

BARD METROLOGY



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To be honest, I'm still not entirely sure how this happened. When the website launched on March 20, 2016, the notion of printing something had never even occurred to me. My internet presence was mostly intended as a writing portfolio to use as reference for freelance work. Alas, after publishing the *IRKALLIAN ORACLE* interview in May I was afflicted by a temporary severance from rational sanity and in an elated moment of creative inspiration vowed that come hellfire or Biblical floods, I would publish at least one article per week until the site had been online for a full year. I have since given myself and others numerous reasons to lament this folly, but a promise made to one-self should never be broken. At some point, suggestions that I compile selected works in printed form had begun taking root and so here we are.

— N. G.

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He mentions Iron Bonehead manager Patrick Kremer and Darragh O'Laoghair from Invictus Productions, who released their "Soma" EP, as such men.

– “Soma” was dedicated to female energies, Okoi continues, and deals with matters of the flesh. “Aura” on the other hand, was predominantly masculine and revolves



"Hero" is a saga of six acts, full songs paired in threes with an intermission between. There are nine tracks on the album with the first, fifth and ninth being short intro or outro-type compositions called "Urðr", "Decima" and "Atropos". They represent beings from Norse mythology called Norns, the old Scandinavian equivalent of what are generally called Fates – female

WHEELS OF FORTUNE

entities who spin the webs of human fate. Each Norn is represented by a triangle in the thematic valknut.

– The three Fates predict what's happening to the hero throughout his life-span, from birth to death. Or rebirth to death rather, now that I'm working with Nietzschean principles again.

I find that most metalheads who prattle on about Friedrich Nietzsche in reality tend to have studied more ORDER FROM CHAOS lyrics, than they have writings of the actual author.

You've actually read his work?

– Oh yes, Nietzsche was a massive life-changer for me when I was seventeen. In German, he's a fucking maelstrom of language and philosophy. The first I read of him was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, then I progressed to his other books.

Okoi describes the German philosopher's ideas as essential to the worldview and perspective he would go on to form in adulthood.

– His influence is undeniable and permeates whatever I do. I imagine it's something you can relate to as well, this idea of the eternal recurrence.

Also known as the 'eternal return', it's the quintessential idea behind Eastern teachings such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The outlook can be traced back to both Indo-European and ancient Egyptian traditions, but fell out of fashion in the West with the rise of Abrahamic doctrine. The philosophy teaches that everything in creation is cyclical. Everything that exists; the energy that flows through it and the very universe that binds them together – it's an echo of itself in perpetual repetition. 'Everything becomes and recurs eternally – escape is impossible', as Nietzsche himself remarked.

– Utterly fascinating. If you occupy yourself with notions of willpower, strife and spiritual elevation; it's something you can't really pass by.

I harbour a sneaking suspicion that when Okoi speaks about things like 'spiritual elevation', which as I've recently come to learn is with some regularity, perhaps not every metalhead grasps what that entails.

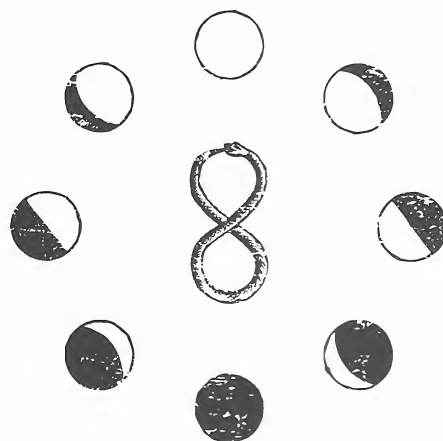
– It's my personal description of euphoria; a vibrant stimulation of inner self as projected by a pleasing rippling through the flesh. It's what I feel when I play on stage and what I strive to achieve whenever I write or express something.

When an exchange of said energy is ignited in a public setting, such as a skilled orator addressing a crowd, there is a cyclical transaction of power between audience and performer.

– That's when the magic happens, when this atavistic force is generated. It turns and it moves and it feeds upon itself; permeating both air and attendance. It also influences

those that are instigating it – for me, this is spiritual elevation. Maybe elevation was not the right expression – it's too much of a one-dimensional expression for such a most profound sensation.

On May 19, Okoi announced through the BÖLZER Facebook page that the recording of "Hero" had been completed. *"This was an intensive, life-changing experience with heartfelt thanks going out to our dear friends/audio wonderboyz Michael Zech & Victor Santura for their patience, inspiration and hospitality. Tight, tight, tight!!! ACHTUNG sensitive scene-police, this one will get your sirens wailing..."*



Besides cursing the implementation of multiple exclamation marks, I remember thinking that it sounded a bit as if he was fishing for a response – trying to sound edgy and a little too-cool-for-school.

– I think I was, exclaims Okoi.

But I sort of take that back now after having seen the online reaction to the September 12 "I AM III" song preview. I honestly didn't think people cared that much these days.

– I'm going to be brutally honest with you; the recording had just been completed and I was very happy for it. We had a few drinks and my head was in a really good place – every so often I get carried away and abandon rationality; hence this ridiculous compulsion to write something, to let people know.

Perhaps not entirely unwarranted. Once BÖLZER began garnering attention, people who once praised them began decrying them as fakes and undeserving of fame. Even seasoned underground musicians were heard grumbling about how they had worked so hard to make a name for themselves, and suddenly this hype machine with one EP and a demo were everywhere. How dare they get so successful.

– I'm well aware of what was going on surrounding our release with "Soma", how people reacted to that as well as some of our

live gigs. We began polarising parts of the scene, and that in my eyes is a great thing.

When "I AM III" was streamed online, a well-frequented metal blog seemingly went out of their way to ridicule BÖLZER – proclaiming them 'hipster metal', and implied that this was nothing for the 'diehard metalhead'.

I trust you noticed this?

– Yes! Yes, I most certainly did. I had heard what kind of individuals they are so I wasn't surprised to read it. I was quite disgusted, but I was kind of expecting that to happen because I'm good friends with KK.

BÖLZER were one of very few bands who took a public stance in this summer's post-Metal Magic spectacle. It saw DESTROYER 666 frontman KK Warslut pitted against the site in question, the combatants exchanging unpleasanties through statements and articles.

– KK is like a brother to me, I understand his personality and how he thinks. The basic rule here is, don't take things at face-value – there's a lot of undermined intelligence within the scene and these simple troglodytes feed off it.

Seeking to create scandal where there is none, Okoi says, with no more fervour for metal besides the financial. Their passion for the music lies in clicks from its audience, and since controversy garners attention they'll think nothing of ruining an underground musician for some lucrative traffic. A scene making claims of being feral and wild should not let itself be policed by merchants of outrage.

– I'm vehemently opposed to that and so I stand against anyone who is a pseudo-activist or moralist ethical bullshitter, that's rubbish. It has nothing to do with creativity in art, which should be free and unbound from those principles. I guess that's why I reacted that way.

I think it's fair to say that Okoi is not known for his burning love for the metal media in general.

– I choose not to generalise here but I have catered to the journalistic whims of a few cretins, yes. I therefore consider it my duty to gracefully decline intellectually challenged candidates with the hope they might review their game-plan a little. The way I see it, I'm doing the entire scene a service.

Then there was the part about the recording process being a 'life-changing experience'.

– This was also uttered in the throes of euphoric elation; it was life-changing because I had transcended many of my fears. For me that's pertinent to the usage of clean singing and this very melodic concept, which was something I had dreaded to do for a long time.

But you had wanted to do it?

– Yes! I sought to do it – I was longing to

WBBTLE ZBBEYFPEKPI'ZUJLZUBELRENOTOR ZBTHA! YHJL'ZJ'YJZU

do it, but for one felt neither comfortable nor skilled enough, and secondly didn't feel there was any place for it in the old material. There was no intuitive drive to implement them so it never happened.

On "Hero" however, the clean vocals are integral to the entire concept.

– Read the lyrics and focus on the clean portions. Musically, they're all over the place – choruses, pre-verses or bridges. Lyrically however, it's always at a moment of clarity or transformation. A metamorphosis. Introspection and self-overcoming based on the character, on the hero.

Okoi claims that this occurred organically; it wasn't thought of, theorised or planned beforehand. It was something that just happened, which he only realised in retrospect.

– That's what happens with this band – I'm driven to do something and I think it's very important people understand that. If they can grasp the concept, and they are creative themselves, they'll know what that force means and how it feels.

Most people have lost touch with that source, he says, and as a result severed their link to the purpose of human existence – to push themselves intellectually and creatively, and to explore the unknown.

– That's all we have, it's the only thing that separates us from the remaining creatures who inhabit the biosphere. While belonging to a complex and important eco system, they do not have this gift that we have – and if it's not being utilised, then we serve no purpose.

This gift you're on about, is this something like the Muse?

– Indeed, the unspoken truth or voice of inspiration that just hits you. All you do is abide by it and take it on board, give it fruition and existence and placement.

Okoi is referring to what in modern terminology is called 'flow states' – they are associated with both athletic endeavours and artistic output. Those who have experienced this phenomenon, in which the craft ostensibly streams autonomously from one's body, will usually end up pondering its origin.

– This explosion, the divine inspiration – a seed that has been planted within your ... I mean, it's obviously from the metaphysical; you feel it. The brain initiates it but it's influenced by something which has no tangible placement, it's just there.

It's a beauty we have in life, one Okoi considers a treasured alimment of his existence.

– It also requires remaining humble and analytical, being able to master argument and discussion and debate with modesty and wisdom. For me, knowledge does not exist without humility.

'He that humbleth himself wishes to be exalted', as Nietzsche put it.

– The quest for ascension need not be elitist, I find that humility should not be automatically equated with weakness. Weakness is anything which you allow yourself to be consumed by, that destroys you. Once again, equilibrium is the deciding factor here.

I read an intriguing theory in an article that received a bit of traction a while back, produced by a blog that promotes 'extreme metal and intersectional feminism'. It raises the possibility that Okoi in fact only pretends to be a free-spirited individualist, in order to divert attention from his clandestine fascist leanings. The time has come to confront him.

– Consider what an unwavering and totally shrewd conviction would be required to maintain such an exhaustive charade! Not to mention to what end – what could possibly be gained from such existential schizophrenia?

Might this Bohemian daydreamer persona be naught but a façade, I wonder, as he covertly dreams of marching in uniform.

– I envy the notion but I am unfortunately cast of simpler tissue – I savour the liberties exempt of the fascist system, such as freedom of expression.

Okoi is himself of diverse ethnic descent. Since he's been subjected to accusations of 'racism', based solely on imbecile interpretations

of his tattoos, I'm curious to know if he sees himself in a racial context.

– Absolutely fucking hell I'm proud of where I come from. My father is half-Nigerian, he grew up in England so he's also very British – he's not practicing any elements of African culture. He's an ingenious musician who plays soulful music, which is his means of expressing his cultural spirit.

His mother comes from a traditional Swiss background, but grew to be as rebellious as his father.

– Both of them boast a very alternative mind-set and interest in music and art. My parents raised my sisters and myself within a multi-culturally conscious framework, one also bereft of prejudice on any level.



While he doesn't regard himself quite as liberal as them, his up-bringing still has a place within his ethical conduct.

– I prefer to remain free. I have no need of distractions from silly notions of either supremacy or inferiority. It has obviously influenced me, being of mixed background – it's always been with me and something I've constantly been made aware of. I got hassled in school of course; surrounded by very simple, monocultural white kids in New Zealand.

Besides the island nation's white population, called Pakeha, there are other large ethnic groups such as Maori, Pacific Islanders and Samoans. Okoi says that being from neither of them leaves one feeling like an outsider among the colonisers.

– I was born in Switzerland – my mum is Swiss and I grew up speaking English and German. I feel European, Europe is my mother root. I have very strong ties to New Zealand but it's just a country for me – a place and an epoch of my life.

In a recent conversation with Karl NE of NASTROND, we discussed man's bond with nature and in particular, the landscape that physically and spiritually moulded its occupants. For instance – the Inuit people from their Arctic climate, Amazonian tribes by the jungle. They would be unlikely to immediately connect with the great wild if they switched places geographically.

– I would wholeheartedly agree. It is only a logical development that organisms would adapt to their environments, physically and emotionally. To uproot an individual from his or her habitat may have adverse effects upon the subject's general constitution, naturally.

Okoi adds that contemporary society has found a parasitical place within him, making certain connections with nature and reality all the more difficult.

– I often see modern life as a distorted and perverse array of stage props, with actors playing out monotonous roles for those who are

WORLDVIEW BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

fortunate enough to see the world differently. I will continue to feel grounded in many different geographical locations, I believe travel and movement are as crucial as stagnancy is deadly.

Is your worldview beyond good and evil?

– I would say so, those concepts only came along with organised religion. Balance, equilibrium and chaos – the never-ending cycle in the eternal conflict of energies; here is where my entire foundation rests. I abide by the laws of nature, and for me chaos is the crowning king of natural rule.

The proverbial edicts of Gaia, evoked by many to prove widely different points. Some who share Okoi's enthusiasm for swirling symbology claim that to mix the races is to defy the eternal decrees



of Mother Nature. That she through anatomical evolution gave us the visual means of identifying our own kind.

– I'm afraid I cannot share their enthusiasm for eugenics as I harbour no ideologies based on the superiority of anyone. That said, I think it would be a great disservice to cultural and ethnical diversity if every folk would indiscriminately breed with one another the world over.

He says that this is only one component in an ongoing process of homogenisation and manipulation, to deface the identity of as much of this globe's populace as possible.

– Beginning with dissolving borders and tribal identity. Now I am most certainly no racist, being of mixed stock myself, but in the name of cultural preservation and the importance of biological diversity, I believe countries and their inhabitants have a right to remain where they are. They should be left to practice what they have always done best; being themselves. The modern times are indeed daunting.

Okoi believes that developments are spiralling out of human control, as civilisation has delved too deep into avarice and tilted entirely out of balance.

– Alas, at this moment in time I'm all for some detriment being introduced to humanity. I feel it's important that we learn from our mistakes, so for me the decisive learning curves are often based around a lot of tragedy and death and suffering.

Cataclysm has heralded every single significant change in history, he points out, and it's important that this chain remains unbroken.

– The humanoid creature learns through conditioning. It would be foolish to place ourselves on a pedestal of demigod stature; we are simple organisms who make mistakes. We are parasitic, we are self-destructive and such things put us in our place.

Friedrich Nietzsche: "The trodden worm curls up. This testifies to its caution. It thus reduces its chances of being trodden upon again. In the language of morality: Humility."

A primordial power of refinement through rupture, he says, is what sets the beat for the universe's rhythm; the pulse of all life.

– The contra-force that generates energy by making disorder fight against balance is why we exist, the only reason there are any life-forms to begin with. It's the everlasting conflict that maintains life – the eternal struggle that never ends, no one wins. Eternal recurrence; that in itself is chaos, and that's why there is chaos philosophy.

ADDENDUM – FEBRUARY 2017

– The reception to "Hero" has been generally very positive. It's not as if we've been campaigning for the blessings of the general populace here; the music is first and foremost a personal exploit, but from what I've observed these past few months the album appears to have been met with many welcoming ears.

Then of course, we have a certain segment of the online metal media who appeared to have made up their mind before it was even recorded.

– Naturally, we have also accommodated the needs of our more discerning critics – there seem to be plenty of them following the new release and they make impressive strides in voicing their opinions... then again, I'm not sure I even care to appease the expectations of a demographic that has not yet managed to grasped what BÖLZER is about.

Okoi has repeatedly made it abundantly clear what his views on individualism and progress are, but it's a tough nut to crack when detractors dismiss one's own words as ideological camouflage.

– If my countless previous interview statements failed to line their stomachs, I wasn't really expecting them to come around now either. So yes, overall we have experienced a somewhat classic case of polarisation – something we can only welcome.

It should perhaps be noted that Okoi doesn't sound at all bitter when speaking about these matters, which goes pretty much in line with the general positive and inspired vibe found in BÖLZER's visual and lyrical content. This is in itself quite interesting since their music stems from a scene built on values that are traditionally negative and destructive – I suspect this to be another case of the duality he's so fond of.

– This is a most valid observation, one we ourselves have considered many times. Ultimately, the band happened to attract a following among listeners of generally more traditional black or death metal sounds, a course of events we could not exactly manipulate to our whims.

What musical categorisation they are subjected to is of little importance, though he'd rather not be ascribed any related ideologies.

– We have little in common with the larger portion of the scene we are purported to belong to, save the good friendships we share with a fair number of individuals and bands alike. That's not to say we can't thoroughly enjoy and celebrate someone's music or comradeship even if their personal views are slightly foreign to ours.

On the contrary, he says, they have become accustomed to it after extensive touring with a wide range of different acts.

– To me, rather than exercising elitism based solely on negation and bigotry – a healthy form of individualism sees a man praising his brothers and sisters for their achievements and general quality of character. I prefer to envisage change brought about via the arduous road of longevity as opposed to the shallow and short-lived victories that seem to be the solution of choice nowadays.

I'm assuming this is why Okoi's lyrics tend to focus more on inspiration than agitation.

– I would certainly agree with your claims of positivity and productivity taking the fore within our message, but the music certainly has its own dark and destructive elements. I believe ours is more of



a fatalistic or realistic approach to certain topics that are otherwise met with the utmost pessimism or resignation, if considered at all.

So you don't have much personal interest in the more scene-typical lyrical themes?

– Not much. I definitely promote the elimination of all things that present themselves as destructive or a hindrance to the development of knowledge, strength and enlightenment. I do not condone the 'easy way out' – which is how I view apathy, nihilism and most organised belief systems as representing.

It's interesting to note the transgressions through metal, as things appear to have taken a shift from being entirely about the ego; who is the most necro, dark, evil, cult

and so on – to a slightly more elevated and enlightened approach.

– I would have to agree in saying this is due by and large to a natural evolution in certain schools of thought, in particular the occult disciplines. One might argue that they are in themselves an overtly egotistical undertaking, so why make chronological comparisons at all?

Okoi adds that paradigm shifts are superficial if everything but the talking points remain the same.

– Personally, I find that not much has changed despite widespread access to information and literature online. The advancements of personal learning and drastic increase in the number of self-proclaimed magicians are to be expected, given the abundant resources.

Yet in essence, the same basic behavioural patterns and tendencies found within most social groupings have remained.

– A testament to our humanity, one could say. I suppose therefore the primary transgression in question here is the one of maturity... the adolescent Luciferian of the nineties scene has since devoured a few books and replaced his pubescent yearnings to burn a church with an effort to build his own holy house.

This, he proclaims, is a far more constructive approach.

– All in all I find these developments to be reassuring, for they would indicate people truly believing both in themselves and change itself, rather than short-sighted acts of rebellion. An advancement from certain stagnancy.

ROK,

VOCALIST OF AUSTRALIAN

UNDERGROUND METAL LEGENDS SADISTIK EXEKUTION, GIVES

A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BAND'S TURBULENT HISTORY. HE EXPLAINS WHY THEY

NEVER BECAME A COMMERCIAL SUCCESS, AND HOW THAT IS IN FACT A GOOD THING FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED.

SADISTIK EXEKUTION

– We are mental metal, says Rok, or in fact punk – our attitude was always closer to THE SEX PISTOLS than DARKTHRONE.

The band's official Facebook page has featured a few posts lamenting the death metal categorisation, which I suppose is fair enough if their preference is to be labelled something else. What gets confusing is their 2010 multi-album box-set named "Death Metal"; I'm assuming this is more SADISTIK EXEKUTION sarcasm that goes well over my head.

– Ah, this can be a bit tricky but I'll try to set the record straight. I drew that artwork in earlier times, before we decided to distance ourselves. Back in the mid-eighties when we formed the band, most of us here in Australia and particularly Sydney simply referred to the likes of HELLHAMMER as death metal.

Black metal was reserved for MERCYFUL FATE and the likes, bands with a straight-out satanic image.

– VENOM, sure – black metal to some, though I called 'em death metal as I did with CELTIC FROST, SODOM and BATHORY. We also thought of what we were doing with SADISTIK EXEKUTION as death metal.

As various American and European bands started sounding a bit different and the genres grew and expanded, so did SADISTIK EXEKUTION's reluctance to be associated with any of them.



– We particularly despised being called black metal, which by then had starting deteriorating into a softer, feminine, gothic and ... 'nice' sound. By the mid-nineties, many of them sounded nothing at all like the older bands – yet we kept being lumped into that stupid fucking category.

Aghast at being associated with the 'melodic bullshit side of things', they agreed that death was preferable. It was in fact an attempt at emphasising this that accidentally named their second album.

– We recorded four songs intended as a demo to send Osmose in hopes of a record deal. We didn't actually give it a name, but wrote 'We are death, fuck you!' on the cassette tape.

As in, 'don't you dare call this black metal'.

– So when Hervé (Herbaut, Osmose Productions manager) saw this, he thought it was the name of the demo tape and perhaps the title of the album we were hoping to make.

A few things then got lost in translation in the subsequent correspondence and so when the deal was finalised, Osmose were firmly intent on releasing an album called "We Are Death, Fuck You".

– We just went along with the idea and focused on recording a few more songs for what in 1994 became our second album. Sloth, our original drummer, had left by then.

This was nothing out of the ordinary, as Sloth had resigned on numerous previous occasions and would do so countless times again over the coming years.

– In his place we had The Mechanik, who performed a number of shows with us over the year and a half he was part of the band.

The Mechanik's time with SAD-EX included 'going mental' at a concert, which landed him in the hospital's spinal injury

SADISTIK EXEKUTION

ward for six weeks. Once he had recovered, he was ultimately fired for not turning up to rehearsals. The timing was unfortunate, as they had been summoned to Europe for a tour with label mates IMPALED NAZARENE and ABSU.

– Only weeks before leaving we linked up with Skitz, drummer for Melbourne hardcore band DAMAGED. He was actually very easy to work with, and although not quite capable of all the drumming required for some songs, he could do the job.

There have been a lot of rumours circulating about this tour ever since. Unsurprisingly, Rok summarises the enterprise as ‘mental’.

– One night while travelling from Germany to Italy, we almost got kicked off the bus. To cut a long story short; our bass player Dave Slave went crazy, caused a lot of trouble and then started fighting with myself and The Reverend Kriss Hades (guitar).

The skirmish inflicted heavy casualties on both band members and vehicular interior. Dave Slave’s leg was injured while Kriss Hades broke a bone in his wrist from punching him repeatedly in the head.

– Sometime after midnight, the bus stopped for quite some time outside Turin airport in northern Italy. I’m not exactly sure what was going on, we thought we were about to be sent back to Australia but were somehow allowed to stay on for the last three shows.

What did young Skitz have to say once he realised what he’d gotten himself into?

– When the madness started happening he’d just shake his head, but he remained calm and cool-headed and just got on with things. As it turned out, we were probably lucky to have him along rather than Sloth or The Mechanik – both are more like us, so instead of three lunatics it would have been four and an even greater disaster overall.

A health issue unrelated to the melee was Rok’s vocal chords, not being accustomed to the strain of singing multiple days in a row.

– By the time it came to do the last show I had almost no voice left at all, so Dave Slave filled in a bit for me. I didn’t really care either way; my aim was to make sure Europe knew that SADISTIK EXEKUTION was totally fucking mental.

I have it on good authority that this impression was firmly cemented.

– At that time the Europeans had only heard our music, perhaps seen some images and read interviews. Although they might have had some inkling of what we were like, they probably didn’t realise we weren’t going to be performing in the standard they were familiar with.

‘Total surprise’ might be best-suited to the response, according to UNPURE’s Kolgrim.

– Or more accurately, misunderstanding

of what they were actually seeing. I think the majority of the audience expected the usual black metal painted-face-and-well-behaved sort of thing. A large percentage of the crowds at those shows were clearly not impressed and some even angry.

Did you notice any difference between European and Australian metal-heads?

– The biggest by far is that Europeans are a much more refined and polite sort of people compared to the rougher, more coarse and crude Aussies. This applies to the general population, not only those into metal.

There exists a fascinating interview with Rok, filmed in Berlin by what appears to be German television. It’s so absurd that I first assumed it was some kind of comedic sketch, and that’s saying something given the remaining video appearances I’ve seen of the man.

– Well, he replies chuckling, you ask me what the hell that was; I still ask myself the same question! Honestly, I really don’t know but assumed they were from a local TV station. I think it had much more impact in later years on YouTube than what it was originally intended for.

Sadly, SADISTIK EXEKUTION never returned to Europe after this.

– For the first few years after that tour, we naturally assumed that no one would ever want us back over there. We never even thought about returning; it was too risky for any organiser, given how we caused problems and behaved so badly.

However, as time went by they started getting offers from various overseas promoters.

– Some of these offers were very generous and one from Finland only a few years

ago was so tempting that we even considered it.

Rok says that what people will never fully understand is the extent and severity of the internal problems the band had developed.

– We’re not like normal, happy, easy-going people when it comes to working together as a band. This means we can’t simply be flown over with any real hope of completing a full set of songs.

It’s interesting to ponder what might have become of them if they’d been able to tour properly in the mid-nineties and onwards.

– Dave Slave and I have discussed this matter a number of times over the years... yes, the internal turbulence has been constant from day one, and yes – the simple reason is we’re not just ordinary people who’ll settle for doing things this or that way.

All of them are strong-willed and passionate with their artistic viewpoints, which is why a lot of the conflict was contested over their output. Perhaps a necessity, in the regard that the SAD-EX we know would have never materialised if it hadn’t consisted of a bunch of maniacs.

– That’s a straight forward fact. The band simply wouldn’t be what it is if we were normal people – that’s why we’re not DESTROYER 666, or METALLICA for that matter. I’m sure you get what I mean. It has stopped us from doing so much over the years but in truth, that’s probably for the best.

Why?

– Had SADISTIK EXEKUTION ever become a more successful touring band, we’d more than likely all either be dead or imprisoned.

All members have at one time or another tried their hand at solo albums, yet neither efforts appear to have garnered much attention. It seems almost as if the dynamic between the four of them is required to truly strike gold.

– Yes, you’re probably right about that. I released two albums, but only for the purpose of my own amusement, with not a care in the world about their success or failure. I just had various ideas I wanted to record, ones that weren’t suitable for SADISTIK EXEKUTION. I think The Reverend Kriss Hades’ venture was the same.

Dave Slave has recorded quite a lot over the years, such as his ongoing personal project DOOMED AND DISGUSTING.

– That’s something he takes a lot more seriously than what the rest of us have done with our solo ventures. These days, he’s still creating his form of doom-horror music as well as various other smaller projects along the way.

Sloth has also played drums for many different bands, mostly as a session member.

– Just because he enjoys playing live, recording and so on. He made a simple punk album under the name BOG, with music



Sadistik Exekution performing in Essen, Germany, April 26th, 1995.



much like THE SEX PISTOLS – also seemingly for his own entertainment.

Any plans for more solo music?

– I'm more into my art these days, but the others are still musically involved in one way or another. We all know though, that the main band was or is SADISTIK EXEKTION.

Rok's artwork has graced their albums ever since the 1991 debut, "The Magus", and the designs are precisely what one would imagine; the madness of SAD-EX captured in visions.

– All my life I've drawn and eventually painted as well. I was born with it inside me, so even at a very young age I started depicting things leaning towards the evil side.

He recalls an incident around the age of ten, when his parents left him at home for a few hours.

– We lived in a large white house, I found some pieces of charcoal and started covering the walls in big swastikas. When my parents came home, they were completely shocked.

Interest in World War II has spread beyond visual art and found its way into his lyrics, with "Demon with Wings" being a fine example.

– I developed an interest in armed conflict when I was quite young, so I spent a lot of time drawing war machines, tanks, guns, missiles and so on. It was just the weaponry, never the ideology behind any particular war or the politics involved.

Around the age of thirteen, heavy metal had made its appearance and the young Rok began including skulls, demons and so forth. It eventually developed into the SADISTIK style we're familiar with today.

– I need not even mention HELLHAMMER's

The Sitting Death cover by Tom G. Warrior as one of the biggest inspirations for the art I still do to this day. I just exaggerated and modified that sort of style.

What about Michel 'Away' Langevin, the VOIVOD drummer?

– People have mentioned this over the years and I'd say that I have probably been influenced by his work – mainly "War and Pain" as his later stuff doesn't impress me so much. Still though, I think it's more a case of coincidence rather than influence.

Other themes are what appears to be hellish landscapes, with a populace of primarily infernal origin; demons, devils and the like. Some motifs look suspiciously like extra-terrestrials, which is a theme explored in "Proxima Centauri". Alas, Rok is quite unimpressed by my observations.

– I have no interest in theology, astronomy, ancient cultures, magic or anything else at all – only the war machines. However, imageries of various things interests me at times, and then emerges in my art as well.

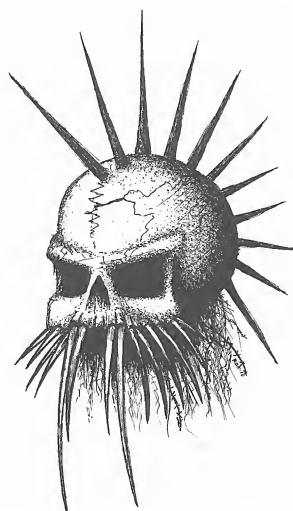
This includes but is not limited to shrunk-on heads on poles, various Christian figures, burning witches, medieval torture devices, engines, space ships and so on.

– Many of these smaller inspirations pop up from time to time. I'm obviously also influenced by my previous work, which I suppose is like evolution – sometimes I come back to revisit a theme or an idea years later.

Based on what I've seen of the man, I must confess to some difficulty in envisioning him sitting down and calmly painting something.

– I may sit or stand quietly when engaged in my art, but while doing so I'm conjuring up very real emotions. The state of mind I try to paint in is a remnant from early experiences I had of listening to HELLHAMMER.

He describes it as an evil sickness running through him – a sort of malignant oozing forced out and into his art through mind,



eyes and hands. Judging from live videos I've seen, this sounds precisely like what he appears to be doing when vomiting forth vocals.

– I make it my aim to do it with true feeling, where I draw out as much of that sensation as possible. It's difficult to explain and some will never understand, but I do and to me that's all that matters. The basics are that my art is real, just as SADISTIK was real.

Do you have any interest in the metal scene at all these days?

– No, I don't. In a way, my mind-set is still stuck in the past and that's what I prefer. I do however very rarely, and I mean like once a year, go see a metal show. Either local bands or perhaps an international band out on tour.

Rok concedes that there are good acts getting around these days, but at the same time he always finds himself going back to the classics.

– I just can't listen to many modern bands for long, even if they're good. I always want to turn it off and play something much older, ranging from JUDAS PRIEST to VENOM or whatever.

From what he's been able to determine, he says the younger generation are largely like the older metalheads. A huge difference though, is the way the internet and other technology has impacted how people listen to their music and communicate with each other.

– Things like Facebook and YouTube, coupled with smartphones, computers and tablet devices mean their experience is far different to what we experienced back in the eighties and nineties.

It's near-impossible to imagine a time when the answers to most questions weren't

VENOM'S SEVEN DATES OF HELL

readily available one search engine engagement away, even for someone who grew up that way.

– It's interesting to me, seeing so many youngsters turn to albums that existed before they were born. What they call 'old-school' seems popular in recent times, which is funny – they're revisiting what was and still is normal to me or other people from my generation.

As the band was starting out, Rok had grand plans for their coming live performances. He had his sights set on the bigger stages, venues that would allow for a proper show.

– My original idea was to be more like VENOM's infamous Seven Dates of Hell video, but with more shit going on. A SADISTIK version of an ALICE COOPER show, if you get what I mean – with various props and theatrics.

What supporting acts would you have?

– I really don't give a shit. Whoever else was performing was never important to me, in our minds it was all about us. Arrogant – yes, but that's what this band is. We never formed to pay any heed whatsoever to who we'd be playing with.

Unfortunately for both spectator and spectacle, the initial ambitions were not quite how things would turn out.

– Obviously we never had the finances or means to actually do any of this. We always had problems – amps, guitar or bass not working, smoke machine or lights failing, and of course the usual fighting within the band.

Things were virtually going the opposite way to what they planned.

– Soon we realised we'd be better off just making our shows more fucked up, as they were turning out to be naturally anyway. That's when I started doing things like tipping rubbish on my head, pissing my pants, throwing things around and carrying on.

Rok names their second-ever Melbourne performance in 1995 as the best SADISTIK EXEKUTION show he can recall.

– It was a warm-up show we did just prior to leaving for Europe. I don't think a video of that one actually exists, but to me it was one of the better and more satisfying shows. Essen in Germany had a good stage at least, as did the one in Sydney when we supported MORBID ANGEL in 1992. Aside from that, we never got to play a large, festival sort of show. That's okay, these days I don't really care anyway.

I seem to remember hearing something about a feud with SADUS.

– Yes, he laughs, you're right – but that was nothing more than a rumour. One of many I might add, some started by us and others just evolved due to our reputation as

troublemaking mental cases. In reality, we have never had any feuds outside the band.

During my preparations for this conversation I read quite a few SADISTIK EXEKUTION interviews from the early to mid-nineties. I got the impression that they were almost baffled over the attention they were getting at the time, since this was clearly nothing they had sought.

– I've never really thought into this much, but over the years I have seen evidence that clearly shows our impact or influence on other bands here and there.

The one thing which has always been in their minds, he adds, is that you don't have to follow the current trends; bands will earn more respect by just doing things their own way.

– By that I mean; don't be a fucking idiot and try to copy Norwegian bands if you're from Australia, America, India, or anywhere else for that matter. Time and time again I see this sort of stupidity – it gave us even more reason to rebel and do things our way.

Their outspoken approach of making people hate them as much as possible must in retrospect be deemed an utter failure.

– People can make up their own minds, if they think we've done something influential then by all means. If they think we're a bunch of useless fuckheads – well, so be it.

After a period of inactivity following the European tour, SADISTIK EXEKUTION released their third album "K.A.O.S." in 1997, followed by plenty of shows around Australia. By 1999, they had slowed down again and played only one show in their hometown of Sydney.

– We were actually planning more live performances but, as to be expected, numerous complications prevented that from happening. One example; we were booked to headline an Australian festival called Metal for the Brain in 2000 – Dave Slave then got into a serious fight and had his leg very badly broken, so we had to pull out.

Despite no live activity, they released the albums "Fukk" and "Fukk II" in 2002 and 2004 respectively. By 2005, they had pretty much abandoned the idea of ever getting back on stage and despite various offers, none were to their liking. Then came 2009, and with it a highly unexpected live return at the Australian Metal Awards.

– The person organising the event could be trusted, the venue was big enough and the deal just enough to entice us. However, it was plagued with all the usual problems, like our own in-band disagreements and a few other things.

Still though, it actually took place.

– As it turned out we thought things went reasonably well, until we saw the video that some cunt uploaded to YouTube – with a completely fucked-up sound. I'm not en-

tirely sure why or how it happened, but the sound was very, very wrong to say the least.

I can testify that it sounds atrocious.

– The instruments are all there but the guitar, bass, drums and vocals are incredibly badly mixed. We're all angry about it, yet it remains online. I live far away from Sydney, so the people behind this are safe for now.

Since then, they've kept receiving offers from both home and abroad – but Rok states resolutely that SADISTIK EXEKUTION will not play again in any capacity.

– A complete and total impossibility. It will never, ever happen!

Any other plans?

– Over the past two years or so I have spent a lot of time concentrating on my art. I have gone through intense art phases in the past where I've created many paintings and drawings in short bursts over a couple of months, only to then leave it completely alone for a year or more.

With his career as a musician largely over, he's determined to venture deeper into his artistic endeavours. At this stage, he's mainly doing small paintings for bands or individuals.

– In the near future I will be releasing limited prints of my work and perhaps do a few other things, such as exhibitions. Anyway, I now choose the traditional way of ending what is my final SADISTIK EXEKUTION interview ... Fukk you all, get fucked – fuck off and die!

EPILOGUE

Upon sending Rok the draft, I found myself for the first time in my writing career berated by the interviewee for spelling errors. Quote:

"It's important that the letter K is always used with the words KUNT, FUKK or FUKKED. Using the letter C would be like me having to listen to Cradle of Filth."

Now, for someone who fancies himself somewhat linguistically inclined – this demands an explanation.

– At the very beginning when we first formed the band, we did actually spell it with C and even made a flyer with the spelling. The C sort of eventually evolved into the K, and I can't honestly tell you precisely when or why. Long before this band started I was a fan of the old Get Smart TV show, featuring the KAOS organisation.

Reminds me of a certain album title.

– KAOS were sort of pseudo-nazis, which goes along with my lifelong interest in German weaponry. So, as you can see this all gels together and once we started using K, we could easily see that C was much softer. We could never go back – that would be like dressing in black for thirty years then suddenly wearing pink!

PHURPA

PHURPA IS A ROVING MONASTIC CHOIR THAT ESPOUSES A ROGUE FORM OF BÖN, THE SHAMANISTIC SPIRITUALITY OF PRE-BUDDHIST TIBET. HAVING BEEN CURIOUS ABOUT THIS RUSSIAN ENSEMBLE FOR SOME TIME I WAS DISMAYED AT THE SCANT INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE SO WHEN A MARCH 2016 STOCKHOLM PERFORMANCE WAS ANNOUNCED I DECIDED THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF ANSWERS, I MIGHT AS WELL DO THE ASKING. THE ENSUING TALE IS A CAPTIVATING JOURNEY SHROUDED IN HIMALAYAN MYSTICISM; FROM THE SHADOW OF THE KREMLIN TO THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT AND FURTHER ON INTO THE VAST EMPTINESS BEYOND.

I had initially agreed with the promoter to do the interview in the afternoon, in order to have it over with and not lurking in the back of my mind during the show. While making my way to the venue I was informed that my appointment had been postponed until afterwards as Alexey Tegin, the orchestra's founder and lead conductor, had announced that 'questions will change during concert'. Upon arrival I found all three members sitting on the floor humming intonations into headset microphones – throat chanting. This is a discipline of overtone singing called *rgyud-skad* ('tantric voice') and is the principle foundation of PHURPA's soundscape; a form of vocal meditation that produces an otherworldly rumbling barely recognisable as human. A range of traditional Tibetan instruments accompany the incantations; drums, cymbals, horns, shells and oboes – some featuring and even made from human and animal remains. Needless to say, this was a far cry from the type of sound-check I'm used to. While watching, the promoter from Stockholm's Bored to Death Bookings mentioned that Alexey was adamant in his demands of a 'strong sound' on stage, proclaiming himself 'not interested in playing music, it's all about power'. At first glance Tegin looks a bit like a younger and bulkier version of The Emperor in the original Star Wars trilogy, had the latter embarked on a career in sidewalk pugilism instead of intergalactic domination. Before I had a chance to speak to him I overheard a conversation with a confused venue employee, the latter ensuring she'd understood him correctly – no lunch, no dinner. Alexey confirmed and informed her that his primary diet consists of raw meat.

– It makes me feel like wild animal, he explained.

Fellow PHURPA member Alexey Naumkin, a sturdy gentleman who looks like a fusion of a tortured Russian author and a Slavic barbarian, commented:

– Alexey, you know, old man who likes to go around – he doesn't want money, he just likes ritual at strange places.

Tegin's spoken English was better than I had expected, yet fairly basic – I have tried to convey his quotes as literally as possible with the occasional restructuring or editing for clarification. Once I'd introduced myself, he happily announced that I was about to witness 'power' and stressed the importance of speaking afterwards, as I would get a glimpse of an alternate reality and be able to form new questions from there. When I enquired about the lack of interviews available he explained that he never bothers with them as he finds the typical questions uninspiring.

– Many ask me 'What about Tibet, what about Bön?' For me it's not interesting. Interesting for me is generating power, travelling around performing rituals; meeting other people and giving them a



change of reality. This is important work for me, this is PHURPA.

Running the questions I'd prepared through my mind, I confirmed to myself that most of them were in one way or another related to Bön. I decided to ask them anyway – as a writer, it would be absurd to interview a religious choir without discussing their doctrines. That's as silly as black metal bands singing about the occult but don't want questions about it.

– We talk afterwards, he said, you will understand.

The venue was literally shaped like a big black box, with the stage area on one end of the room. Immediately in front of the ritual space were floor seats, then a few rows of chairs, and at the rear people who watched standing. The bar was closed for the duration of the performance so there were barely any people moving back and forth in front of the stage. Besides a handful of cretins who used flash photography and others who filmed parts of it with cell phones (seriously, all amateur PHURPA live videos look exactly the same – what exactly are you hoping to capture?) there were barely any disturbances at all. I had myself listened to studio record "Tro-Wo Phur Nag" (2007) and live album "The Magic Rituals of the BÖN Tradition" (2014) as well as watched the Boiler Room video prior to this but neither one of them could have prepared me for what followed.

As soon as the reverberating triad of inhuman bellowing commenced I realised there are visual, auditory and especially physical frequencies that can't be captured in recordings, one must participate to understand. As such, reading a PHURPA live review is almost as pointless as writing one but if I were to describe the sensation it would be the musical equivalent of kundalini yoga – a practice where one utilises challenging postures to attain an altered state of consciousness, sensory monotony being the common denominator. The insistence for a post-ritual convergence made perfect sense but in the after-shock of that two and a half hour cerebral earthquake, I felt in no mood for heavy discussion. Luckily, Alexey was swarmed by attendees as soon as he left the backstage and remained engaged until the venue closed. PHURPA were staying in Stockholm for the

weekend as they were booked for a second, private event the following day and since I was attending this function we decided to reschedule the interview once more.

– PHURPA is not theatre, says Alexey, PHURPA is Bön. We don't play ethnic music, we are not Tibetan folk group – this is tantric ritual. Inside of me, I have information about ancient magic cultures. Even before Bön, I practiced the magic of Carlos Castaneda.

Castaneda, a Peruvian national with a Ph.D. in anthropology, wrote a series of supposed autobiographical books about his training in shamanism and *bruja* (the sorcery of the Americas) under the tutelage of a Native American shaman named don Juan Matus. One day in the early eighties, Alexey happened across a piece of writing that started a process which would irrevocably alter the course of his life.

– I held in my hands a book called “Ancient Persian Languages”. When I opened it and looked I saw the word *tegin*, my name – the book said it means ‘prince’ in ancient Persian. For me it was very strange. Two or three days later I had a dream where a vibrating voice gave me information about space; knowledge of a cosmic absolute, an ancient construction of all human minds connected through sound.

Shortly thereafter, Alexey heard a cassette tape that his friend had brought back from Tibet. It contained a traditional Bön ritual, performed by monks in a Tibetan temple.

– My friend knew a Frenchman who travelled to a temple and asked to record a ceremony. They said ‘No, never – no one records our rituals! We are monks, not music men; if interested in music – go to countryside and record.’

Fortunately, the French gentleman had studied the ancient Tibetan language and when he addressed the monks in it they changed their tune; he was to be the first and last man to record their worship.

– It was a terrible ritual to a deity called Mi-dud jam-pa trag-mgo – a bloody god that carries a severed human head, adulated in songs and blood. When I listened to this cassette, the music had great resonance within me – very strange. To me, it was a magical sound. It was like the dream voice.

Prayer mantras in Bön rituals are conveyed by means of throat chanting. Transfixed by the obscure sound, Alexey realised what the strange voice in his dream was and – immediately sensing that he was onto something, began mimicking it.

– As I learned, I understood that the singing must be without emotion – invest all power into it. Power, not emotion! Making no human modification to the sound, it must be inhuman. As I kept practicing it started to change my life, body and mind. I trained my voice and my voice trained me. Reciprocity.

When you started learning the prayer chants, was it from spiritual or musical curiosity?

– There's no need to separate them – music is the spirit sound, a declaration of the soul inside you. Our mantras are sung in a deep tone so we don't change the world around us – just like silence; loud and quiet at the same time. First you learn throat chanting and create something, then comes spiritual texts.

To be able to study the scriptures Alexey first had to learn old Tibetan and then start translating mantras. In the Bön tradition there are five tutelary deities of the Father Tantra called yidams, they stand in eternal vigil guarding the teaching against ignorance and other enemies. One of them is the god of resolved action – Phurpa.

– Phurpa connects with the action aspect of the Enlightened One (Father Tantra). When we give concerts in other countries, it's aggressive. For me, PHURPA is a terrorist for people's mind – altering reality for people, mental terrorism. But I'm no missionary saying ‘I know the spirit way’; only you know the right path for yourself, not me. What happens when you return is up to you.

Even if this to a certain extent serves to increase awareness of the Bön teachings, Alexey says it isn't the primary purpose – nor is it for the betterment of either themselves or the attendees.

– It's for space, only space. We declare our power; cry out our place in different complex aspects. Our songs are for the gods, different rituals for different yidams – they come to our reality through our voices and we change minds.

Alexey's early pilgrimage along the Bön path was a lonely one, it wasn't until many years later he came across someone else with similar interests. This led to an early incarnation of PHURPA and as they began performing, they started garnering attention.

– After one performance some guys said they wanted to sing like us so we trained them with special exercises I learned from the dream.

One is reminded of the route to Bön as described earlier in the conversation; first the psalms, then scripture. As the clergy evolved they built their own shrine in an abandoned building in central Moscow, near the Kremlin. It became known as the Fabrique of Cardinal Art.

– You know the term squatting? We made a rehearsal space from an empty building of four thousand square meters. We got electricity, painted the walls and brought in amplifiers.

The ritual ambiance they created eventually travelled across the Moscow River to the very heart of Russian political power.

– We had a big drum, maybe two meters – it made a very loud sound that was carried across the water to the Kremlin. Three security police with Kalashnikovs came – ‘What is this? Are you narcotic dealers?’; ‘No’ we said, ‘we practice Bön’. They asked ‘What is Bön?’ so we told them to put away their weapons, sit down and listen. We performed for two hours, extremely loud sound in our dark labyrinth auditorium. Afterwards we asked if they had any more questions; ‘No, we go’. I called after them; ‘Guys, you left your Kalashnikovs!’... ‘Oh, thank you’ – it was good times.

Was this in the Soviet or Russian era?

– In-between. Perestroika – it was revolution situation.

Alexey remembers these years as the best of his life. Alas, this came to an end near the turn of the millennia; an unceremonious revelation in the shape of construction workers showing up to announce that their temple was being turned into a parking lot. The group was given a week to clear it out before the entire building was levelled to the ground.

– I told boss of workers they wouldn't build anything in this space – never, nothing. No one believed me. Every night of that week my friend and I performed the ritual *trul-shen*; Bön destroy magic – special rite, very difficult preparations. When we moved out we left behind symbols in blood. Afterwards, they said on the TV news that construction was stopped because Moscow River was running under the ground, so anything built there would crash. It was our rituals, I promise.

In its present-day shape, which is adhered to by about ten percent of Tibet's population, modern Bön is largely a form of Tibetan Buddhism – a consolidation of faiths that can be traced back to the 14th century when Bön teachers started merging the two. Although differing vastly from its original manifestation, today's practitioners see themselves as successors to the ones of yesteryear. Alexey however, makes no claims of being part of either. Having learned from the source rather than living tutors he has no official initiation, no masters or any lineage – something that's usually considered crucial in all things tantric.

– We practice the original, shamanistic tradition – I have studied old documents and translated from ancient language. For the Phurpa aspect there is only a little information because it must be resonated with, not studied. Listen to Tibetan monks and PHURPA, not the same sound. Different voices of the Bön tradition, we sing PHURPA style; more aggressive, more power. Like martial arts – karate and kung fu; different instruments from same spring.

Another dissimilarity is PHURPA's inclusion of the fairer sex, with Russian vocalist Alissa Nicolai having a prevalent role on the 2014 live album “Mantras of Bon”.

PHURPA

– She’s been my friend for five or six years, I invited her to join us on a few concerts. I gave her a central note and told her ‘Sing around note like crazy woman, like devil’. In our ritual she is the voice of the Dakini – a terrible black woman in Bön tradition. For woman, it’s good role. When Alissa sang, it was like a woman from hell and afterwards she asked me ‘Is this my nature?’ ‘Yes’, I said. It’s interesting because we all meet our true self when looking inside.

This does however seem like a step away from not only the modern but also the old Bön approach to prayer song.

– It’s not classic Bön tradition practiced in temples, no... for me those are not the real guys. The naljorpa (a Tibetan ascetic who possess magic powers) is without temple, without tradition – the best guys. In old time of Bön there were no temples in Tibet, who knows what it looked like in ancient ages?

Alexey goes on to explain how wandering shamans like the naljorpa once spread Bön under different names throughout what is now known as Siberia, Mongolia, Iran, Tibet and India.

– It is total name for ancient shamanistic tradition. ‘Tibet’ is the name of a contemporary country – Bön was practiced in an era before it even existed but Tibet saved Bön, so it’s good. PHURPA uses Tibetan names and language but we had the same traditions in Siberia, though not many of those customs survived.

Given Alexey’s unconventional interpretation of the teachings, I’m curious to know what an ordained practitioner might think of his practices.

– When I met with monks I showed them my exercises; ‘Wow, you have a good voice’, they said. I taught them some techniques like headstand breathing exercises and special drinks.

Special drinks?

– I drink hot tea with cayenne pepper or chilli, it burns inside like fire. Afterwards, milk or animal fat.

This reminds me of the peculiar carnivorous dietary habits I overheard the day before. Alexey explains the principle behind the motto, ‘different eat for different purpose’.

– There is power in food. If you want to feel wild like a tiger or shark you need raw meat, maybe a little salt and pepper. I like horse meat, in Moscow this is possible. When you eat it, there is fire inside you. Sometimes your body says ‘stop fire’, then you drink yoghurt. This is for Phurpa, action aspect – if you instead want information from space you drink only water and eat vegetables.

Alexey mentions that other PHURPA monks have also met with their Tibetan counterparts.

– One went to a temple in Tibet and told the monks ‘We have CD, we sing’ and asked if they wanted to listen. They did and asked ‘You come from Russia? Unbelievable.’ When he came back next day they were playing our CD, their master said ‘Very strange, but the guys know what they’re doing’.

After being a devotee for the greater part of his life, I wonder how big of a role his spirituality has had in shaping him into current manifestation.

– Do I look like an old man? How old do you think I am?

No idea, fifty-something?

– I was born in April 1951, I will soon be 66. It’s a result of Bön practice; it changes your body, your social connection and your behaviour. You feel true to yourself, to your physical self.

A PHURPA performance is a rather physically taxing affair, which is why the vessel of flesh is as crucial as its sonic output.

– Our performances are sometimes between two and four hours, for this you need training. It’s not only recitation; it’s a physical exercise that changes your body.

Besides the Tibetan tradition Alexey also studied the rituals of ancient Persia and Egypt and though finding titbits, there is simply not enough knowledge preserved to reproduce them. He did however have plenty of interesting experiences along the way.

– I went to Egypt with my wife, as tourists. In the Khafre pyramid I looked at the guard and saw that he was Coptic, not Muslim.

The relevance of this observation is that anything that could be interpreted as prayer or meditation is strictly prohibited in the pyramids, as it violates Islamic law. For instance, merely closing one’s eyes is banned, as is walking with bare feet. The Copts are one of Egypt’s religious minorities and often find themselves at odds with the Muslim majority; hence, a Coptic guard might not be overly concerned with enforcing rules from the Quran.

– He looked back at me and I started singing a little.

A cavernous rumbling emanates from his throat.

– When the other tourists left he said I could stay and sing – I did and he listened. Afterwards, he told me I could lie in the sarcophagus – very good for me. I lay in there with my eyes closed for ten minutes; bye, bye. Very strange. When I got back up I looked at the guard and said ‘I remember you, I know you – you are my friend. Not in present times but in a past life’. We had just reconnected.

As an unsuspecting attendee of a PHURPA concert, what exactly am I looking at?

– What you see is vast, empty, dark space – cosmic, without any attributes of civilisation. The covered hats for example, there are two aspects to them. People look at the performer and wonder what he’s feeling, but you can’t see PHURPA – no human emotion. Sometimes I close my eyes and sometimes they are open but I see nothing either way – no visual information. I chant in a deep voice and sometimes without the mind – I dream and all I see are stars, yet I keep singing.

Not only is the headwear rather adventurous, the remaining wardrobe is equally alien.

– You don’t wear civilian clothes when you go to war, you dress in uniform. When the spectator sees us it must be something that is not normal, not connected with real life; should be like a dream.

At the start of the ritual Alexey burns dried Mongolian juniper bushes, this produces vast amounts of smoke.

– Good smell, he explains, very powerful for me. The smoke rises to space like a signal for the gods to notice us, to see PHURPA.

He describes their music as a power generator, broadcasting loud enough to drown your inner monologue with a reverberating stillness of mind; he wants the audience to feel it as much as hear it – prayer mantras pulsating through their chakras.

– In our bodies we have the real, true information. The mind is good for contemporary social situations but the body has the truth, the knowledge of all.

He then reveals how he came to learn about the physical gifts of music, quoted verbatim.

– I liked to party when young, he says while emitting a thumping techno beat, same situation to trance. I understand young people who... OMPH OMPH with narcotics, it’s good. Spirit – SHOOSH, travel another world.

While not feasting on any mind-warping compounds himself, he says he doesn’t need them to enter an altered state, Alexey is not averse to them as long as they’re treated with proper reverence and respect.

– They give you knowledge but you give them your mind, your eyes, your hearing and your body. People think it’s only for them but they have to give something back; before you use them, you decide what you can give in return. Their spirits have no human morals, different sort of power – you need to know why and use them wisely. After trip you must have results and use the information to do yourself good. It’s not relaxation, not meant to feel good or taste nice – it is work.

He also notes that nature’s pharmacy won’t induce brilliance to a mediocre mind.

– If you eat narcotics and think you will play like Jimi Hendrix – no. But I like music guys who use narcotics, normal minds don’t interest me. It’s your own way; your choice, there are no laws. It’s your life and it must be interesting – it’s a journey and an experience.

BRUTAL ASSAULT

Alexey remarks how modern people constantly crave new information, new data to process – and as such have short attention spans.

– For me, it's very strange because it's only information – not knowledge. To get knowledge, you must do work within.

As word of PHURPA spreads through genres like black metal and dark ambient, they have found themselves making festival appearances. One that went well was the 2015 Sommer Sonnwend Celebration festival in Salzburg, Austria.

– Good guys at the fest in the Alps, berserkers – I like it. Real, good men. Fire, brutal – it's good.

Two other festivals that invited them were Czech metal open air Brutal Assault and a smaller black metal-oriented gathering called Nidrosian Black Mass in Brussels, Belgium. Alexey appears somewhat perplexed by the attention he's been getting from the extreme metal scene lately. I explain that at least part of the fascination is their complete and genuine devotion to spirituality, something not particularly common in black metal.

– I like metal guys in a social way because I prefer people whose way is opposite to normal but the problem is authenticity, much seems to be just decoration. Metal music needs more devotion, many bands seem to be more like a business. They say it's spiritual but after they take off their dresses they live standard lives, it's not interesting. Also, they use attributes from different cultures without having deep knowledge about them. I asked a guy, 'What is this 666? Kabbalah?' He didn't know, funny.

He has a rather pragmatic take on the genre's devotion to darkness.

– In Bön tradition, there are no concepts of good and evil. To me, Heaven is like a house for old men; not interesting. Hell is interesting; contrast, power, plus and minus – that is life. In Heaven – nothing, total death.

Neither is he especially impressed by the music side of hell's rock 'n' roll.

– We don't listen before or after our performances but I have heard fragments. I think black metal needs different instruments; they should create their own – hear sound inside and construct one that can make it.

This is the approach Alexey has wholeheartedly embraced in his industrial side-project CORPS, in which he exclusively uses instruments built from scrap metal.

– This is contemporary Bön, industrial Bön. All instruments are made by me, I am good hand-maker – if I need a cosmic sound I know how to build something that will generate it. The concept is a situation that can manifest, the whole planet destroyed by a third world war – post-apocalyptic. The survivors rediscover music without memories of what any of the styles sounded like before destruction. They use what's available to play the music inside them – very natural, like animal sound.

As the observant reader will have noticed by now, the concept of 'power' is central to Alexey's worldview.

– Power is power. We have muscles but our intentions decide how to use them – if you want to smash something, you apply power by thinking it. Power in your mind is power inside you. When you meet people, you can see if they have it – you can feel it. Empty, clear power – without human attributes. Power like cosmic space, you create it inside before your hands can use it.

Fellow member Eduard Utukin adds his take on the matter.

– In our faith, emptiness is not the absence of all – it's everything. If we create sound or magic we open the emptiness and form from it, in there all is possible. From potential to kinetic.

Alexey resumes:

– Power from emptiness. We make deal with the power, it manifests through this contract.

He says that when imploring the void to do your bidding you

must promise it your utmost efforts and once a deal has been struck, it can't be renegotiated.

– If you work poorly your life will crash but if you produce the best power, it connects with yourself and your body becomes instrument for spirit. The spirit, power, emptiness – whatever you call it, gives you task and if you say 'yes' you are a warrior inside. It's not a joke, if you take the first step you can never go back. For me it is my happiness – foundation of my life. My life is content when I connect with emptiness. I am Alexey and my body is not me, it's my instrument only.



ADDENDUM – FEBRUARY 2017

Since a few people have inquired about the private event mentioned in the article, I consulted a participant who appeared to have had a rewarding experience.

– The concert took place in a small and freezing cold concrete bunker, featuring in total five spectators with PHURPA performing two metres in front of us. Before they started singing, I ate a moderate serving of psilocybin mushrooms.

That sounds adventurous.

– I was rather sceptical to the idea initially, their music sounds quite intimidating and I was concerned of ending up so confused and bewildered that I'd lose track of what was happening. Seeing them in front of me, bellowing out that noise, without grasping the context... suffice to say, I wouldn't want to disrupt the performance by suffering a meltdown.

What made you change your mind?

– In the weeks leading up to it, I kept going back and forth between consuming a very modest serving or nothing at all. The public concert the night before, however, completely reverberated away any and all doubts. I knew as soon as I felt the music, as opposed to just hearing it, that I would be fine. I was even less nervous going into this than I would be doing it in the comfort of my home. Quite remarkable actually, as this took place in an unfamiliar location with people I don't know – usually not optimal.

As it turns out, the optimism turned out to be warranted.

– This will obviously sound retarded to anyone who has never used mushrooms, but that feeling of a living mycelium entity coming to life within you – that sense was throbbing in complete symbiosis with their mantras. It was as if the rumbling voices resonated with the fungus frequency.

So no fear?

– None, I don't even recall having a single human thought for the duration of the experience, nor paying the slightest bit of attention to anything else than the sound waves soaring out from the ether. As soon as I relaxed into the experience I instinctively closed my eyes and kept them shut. Without visual stimuli, it really felt as if my entire reality merged with whatever current those voices emanate. I completely lost track of time as well, I know that their set on the first evening was two and a half hours – I imagine that this was slightly shorter but impossible to say.

The final verdict then, is obviously one of approval.

– Can't really say I brought back many rational or pragmatic insights, these lessons were more profound in nature. I'd go so far as to say that this was one of the most sacral experiences of my life, and something I'm still in the process of integrating. Also quite eye-opening in regards to what can be achieved by the human voice, something I don't imagine we've even scratched the surface of. To quote Alexey; 'better than first night, more power.'

PHILIPPE LÉVY: THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN MIND

FOR THIRTY YEARS, GRAHAM
HANCOCK HAS SOUGHT TO ANSWER UN-
SPOKEN QUESTIONS ABOUT HISTORICAL MYSTERIES.

GRAHAM HANCOCK

ANCIENT MARKINGS ON CAVE WALLS LED HIM INTO JUNGLE
DARKNESS, WHERE THE VINE OF THE SOUL GAVE HIM
CLUES THAT COULD SOLVE THE RIDDLE OF
HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS.

Graham Hancock is a British journalist and the author of several major international bestsellers. His books have sold more than seven million copies worldwide and have been translated into thirty different languages. He's had two major television series, *Quest for the Lost Civilisation* and *Flooded Kingdoms of the Ice Age*. Hancock's latest book, *Magicians of the Gods*, was published in the autumn of 2015.

– My first investigation into an ancient mystery was *The Sign and The Seal*, says Graham Hancock, which I began to research seriously in 1987 and finally published in 1992. I immediately set to work on my next book.

Fingerprints of the Gods: The Evidence of Earth's Lost Civilisation was published in 1995 and is estimated to have surpassed three million copies in sales. The book argues that a previously unknown but highly advanced civilisation existed in prehistory, one whose imprints can be traced through ancient myths and megalithic structures. Additional bestsellers exploring the same hypothesis followed, with *The Message of the Sphinx* in 1996 and *Heaven's Mirror* in 1998.

– In 2002 I finished a massive tome called *Underworld*, following which I discontinued my pursuit of cultures past for the time being. I wanted to explore the mysteries of human origin. The fossil records contain many gaps over the millions of years that preceded the emergence of civilisation, as recognised by historians, around five thousand years ago.

He sought to probe these cracks diligently enough for something to emerge – fresh insight, some scrap of previously neglected information that might shed light on the great ambiguities of the hominid predicament.

– Why has the human being – alone among all animal species, developed not only culture and belief in an afterlife but things like the ability for creating and appreciating art, to use and manipulate symbols?

These are questions he tries to tackle in his 2005 book, *Supernatural: Meetings with the Ancient Teachers of Mankind*.

– During the first seven million years of human evolution, there is no evidence for the existence of symbolism amongst our ancestors. All we see throughout this period is a dull mimicking and mindless recreation of both behavioural patterns and innovation, or lack thereof.

Once a change is introduced – a tool perhaps, it then sets a new precedent that's copied and duplicated without improvement for a further immense period until the next change is finally adopted. In the same process, we also see the gradual development of human anatomy in direction of the modern form. The brainpan grows larger, the brow-ridge is reduced in size, and our overall anatomy becomes leaner.

– About 200 000 years ago, humans had achieved what we call full anatomical modernity. This means they were physically indistinguishable from us – and crucially, that they possessed the same large



ADAM ZAARS

and complex brains.

The most striking mystery, however, is that their behaviour continued to lag behind the endorsement of modern neurology and appearance.

– No sign of culture, spiritual beliefs or self-consciousness – nor any interest in symbols. Indeed, there was nothing that would identify them with 'us'.

Not a trace of innovation for 150 000 years, no progress or even improvements. What happened next is perhaps the greatest riddle of both palaeoanthropology and archaeology; an ignition through the spine of humanity, on not just isolated locations but across the entire globe.

PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

– The sudden appearance of fully representative symbolic art on cave walls about 40 000 years ago represents a spectacular enigma. This is a stark contrast from the endless, unimaginative cultural desert that humankind had been stumbling blindly across ever since learning to tread upright.

As part of his investigation, Hancock visited cave art sites in Spain, France and various other locations in Europe, as well as remote rock shelters in South Africa. All of them difficult to access – he found images of animals, humans, and hybrids of beast and man; therianthropes.

– It's really as though a light was switched on in the human mind. The brain was there all along, it just hadn't been used until then.

Oddly, this art was already fully perfected from the moment it began to be created. There does not appear to have been a learning curve.

– And why was it accompanied by other significant changes in human behaviour – more sophisticated stone and bone tools, better hunting strategies and the first evidence of spiritual belief?

Correlation is all we have – but looking at the behavioural advancements that appear simultaneously, it poses an intriguing mystery. Whatever divine spark drove our common ancestors to start painting must have propelled the remaining changes as well.

– Explain archaic art and we uncover the origins of modern humanity. It's therefore of the greatest interest that such a theory has already been proposed and peer-reviewed, and does indeed explain similarities in Stone Age art of vast geographical distances.

As we discover later in the conversation, the same characteristics can to this day be found in art produced by shamans of remote tribal communities.

– The prevailing theory among anthropologists proposes that the eerie similarities and universal themes linking these different systems of art are because the artists were all depicting the same thing. They were drawing what they had seen in deep visionary trance.

Irrespective of cultural differences, all humans share the ability to enter altered states of consciousness. Everyone has access to the same entoptic phenomenon; visual effects whose source is within the eye itself. Reports of the same geometrical patterns and entities that were painted on cave walls 40 000 years ago still emerge on a daily basis, both from ritualistic jungle application and scientific lab research.

How would they achieve this back then?

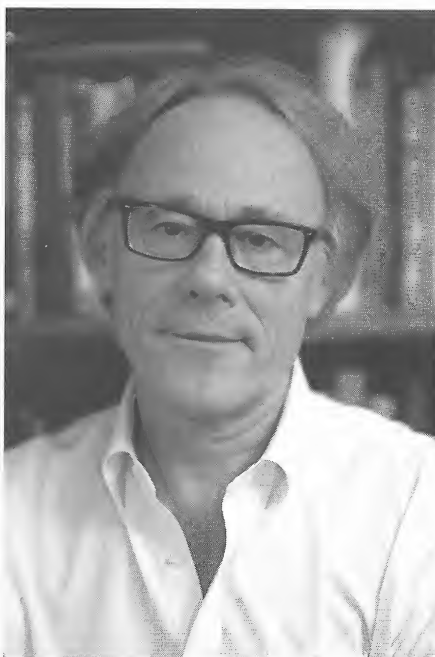
– The same way humans do today; various techniques such as prolonged rhythmic dancing and sweat lodges, or by eating psychoactive plants they had discovered while foraging for food. Regardless of guide, the

destination seems to have looked similar; it was then recreated and memorialised in their cavern sanctums.

Before we proceed into the altered side of things, we should try to establish what's meant when we speak of a consciousness.

– I offer no facts – only my own view, which is that life is a theatre of experience. My belief is that consciousness is something fundamentally nonphysical and in fact one of the driving forces behind this universe.

He likens it to currents such as gravity or electricity, and adds that it's through a 4.5 billion yearlong evolutionary process



that the human consciousness has arrived to where it is today.

– Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and his ilk goes so far as to claim that evolution proves there's no transcendental meaning to life. That there's no such thing as spirit, that consciousness doesn't survive physical death. I'm not against evolution, that's preposterous. It's an inarguable fact – but it is ascribed far too much value in tracing our origins.

Hancock feels that Dawkins is one of many hard-line atheists of academia that reduce everything and anything to matter. They claim, he says, that we are little more than meat with an accidental 'epiphenomenon of brain activity'.

– No honest scientist would deny that consciousness is science's greatest mystery, that we don't know exactly how it works. The brain is unquestionably involved but how, we don't know. It's obviously possible that they are right, that the brain produces consciousness the way a generator makes electricity.

If you hold to that paradigm, then you will undoubtedly arrive at the conclusion that death means a fade to black. When the transmitter breaks down, the signal of consciousness fades.

– It's equally possible – and nothing in neuroscience rules it out, that this relationship is more like that of signal to antenna. If the television set is broken, the transmission will persist regardless if it's being broadcast or not.

But doesn't brain damage compromise consciousness?

– True, but this doesn't prove that those parts of the brain generate the relevant areas of consciousness. If you were to smash one side of your television set – the picture would probably be distorted or vanish, but the signal would still be there.

This is the core of all spiritual traditions; our souls are immortal, we briefly manifest in a corporeal vessel to learn and to grow and to develop.

– To study the mysteries of transience – these materialist, reductionist scientists are the last we should be consulting. They have nothing relevant to add to the discussion, at all.

Instead, he suggests seeking council from the ancient Egyptians; a culture that put their best minds to work at solving the riddle of mortality for three thousand years. They strove to learn how to best utilise life in preparation for death, and the weighing of one's heart on the scales of Osiris.

– What Dawkins doesn't consider is the possibility that 'the spirit world', for lack of a better term, has used evolution to manifest physical entities in which consciousness can emerge and express itself.

Graham believes that mind generates matter, that the physical realm and its inhabitants are projections of a primordial awareness. Like the lore of various ancient wisdom decrees; as above, so below.

– According to these traditions, the cycle of life is a most profound journey of experience and discovery. We traverse its pathway to learn lessons that can only be taught in the flesh. It does us good to remember that we have been given a precious opportunity here, to be born as human beings into this world of matter and consequences.

As opposed to being spawned a plankton, in which case one can't exactly sit down and meditate upon the mysteries of subterranean nautical dwelling.

– We have the entire biosphere here to support us. Four billion years of earth evolution has led us to a point where we can distinguish between good and evil, darkness and light, love and fear – where we can make conscious choices that will impact us and others on many levels.

There are many ways to induce alterations to the human consciousness. The

AMPHIPHILICITY

Bushmen of South Africa reach it through night-long dancing and drumming, Amazonian tribes burn themselves and then smear the wound with frog poison, and Christians drink the symbolic blood of their Messiah. Secular westerners mostly turn to caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

– In prehistoric Europe, it's most likely that these states were attained through the consumption of *Psilocybe semilanceata* – the popular little brown mushroom that is still used throughout the world today.

In Central America, the Maya and Aztecs used other psilocybin mushroom species to access the same headspace.

– I took LSD once in my twenties and had a fantastic, exciting, energising twelve-hour stroll through a parallel reality. When my normal, everyday consciousness returned – it did so very abruptly.

Graham felt grateful for such a wonderful experience but in even greater awe of its power. As positive as his maiden voyage had been, had it taken a darker route with the same intensity it would very likely have been sensorially unpleasant.

– It was not until I reached my fifties and delved into *Supernatural* that I decided to resume that particular line of inquiry. As a writer I have always believed that when I research a subject, I must explore it personally. I must inject myself into the story.

May I ask what your wife had to say when you announced your intention to start consuming hallucinogens?

– I explained that the book couldn't be written in any authentic way without doing this. Santha immediately saw the point and said, willingly, 'Let's go for it.'

This is behaviour he's known for; as part of his surveying for *Underworld*, Graham along with wife and photographer Santha Faiia got diver's certificates, then dove at exceptionally dangerous sites to study submerged structures. They were now bound for even darker waters.

– I drank ayahuasca with shamans in the Amazon and self-experimented with DMT, mushrooms, and the African visionary drug known as iboga.

Iboga is 'the plant that enables men to see the dead' – a claim Graham can attest to. The perennial shrubbery is native to western Central Africa and revered by the Bwiti people as a foundation for their religion. It has also proven extraordinarily successful in treating heroin addicts, as it resets the brain's opiate receptors which in turn alleviates withdrawals.

– The downside is that consumption instigates forty-eight hours of physical and mental hell. Fascinating, but nothing I'm in any hurry to relive again.

Beyond the South American rainforest and certain parts of Australia, DMT is mostly accessible in smokeable form – a method of

ingestion known to produce approximately ten minutes' worth of interdimensional astral flight. Drinking it in an Amazonian potion known as ayahuasca activates a deeply reflective and visionary experience that lasts up to four hours.

– The brew has been drunk for at least three millennia and is regarded by the indigenous people as a portal to the spirit world.

Since DMT can be found all through nature and even endogenously in the human brain, our body has developed a way to ensure that we're not engulfed in hallucinatory rapture from simply eating a salad.

– There is an enzyme in our gut called



monoamine oxidase (MAO) that switches off DMT on contact. The ancient shamanistic societies of the Amazon, however, found a workaround for this problem.

The banisteriopsis caapi vine, called ayahuasca by the locals, contains an MAO-inhibitor that deactivates the enzyme and allows DMT to be absorbed orally. How, thousands of years ago, shamans managed to select two plants out of the estimated 150 000 different species found in the Amazon is not known. Local lore has it that hunters observed the jaguar chewing the vine's bark and subsequently tumbling about in an oracular stupor. Wanting to know what the fuss was about, the tribesmen figured out how to prepare a tea from it. Drinking this brew, the vine – which consumed on its own instills a sense of communication but no visions, told them what else to add to the cauldron.

– The vine is boiled together with leaves rich in DMT to produce a foul-tasting but highly psychoactive beverage. There is no written language among these cultures, so the entire lore has been kept alive by oral traditions. Their ancestors, they say, were

taught the secret by spirit-beings as a gift to mankind.

This is why the jaguar has such a central place in ayahuasca mythology. In the past decade, the 'vine of souls' has garnered global interest from scientists and civilians alike, having been described as 'twenty years of psychotherapy in one night'. Few do it for fun however, as the actual imbibing is a bit of an ordeal.

– For a start, it is among the most repulsive flavours and smells on the planet – it tastes like a ground up frog. Within about forty-five minutes of drinking it you are likely to suffer bouts of severe nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. This is what's known as 'the purge'.

Alongside the light and joy and valuable life-lessons ayahuasca ceremonies are known for – after the violent expulsion obviously, there are the occasional terrifying psychic challenges.

– Encounters with seemingly malevolent entities in convincingly freestanding parallel realms, this can be rather distressing to say the least.

The extraordinary experiences he went through persuaded him that anthropology was right. In the thick of the rainforest jungle, equally deep in the throes of its nectar, he recognised shapes and patterns from the cave walls.

– It must have been the discovery of psychedelic plants – ones that induce states of this sort, which provided the inspiration for ancient rock art around the world.

Graham says it's to the proper examination of these experiences we must turn, should we want to discover from whence the first spiritual ideas ever entertained by our ancestors derived.

– It's at this point that I deviate from the official narrative. What absolute nonsense, that the entire inspiration for the birth of humanoid art should be reduced to nothing more than optical illusions of synapses firing in the brain – 'hallucinations'.

As he's prone to, Hancock chose not to settle for the official version of events. He refused to accept that the inspiration for cave art and subsequent birth of human religion is neatly accounted for by mere shifts in brain chemistry.

– Not with the earliest spiritual insights of mankind rendered down to mere epiphenomena of biological progression, with the sublime thus efficiently reduced to the ridiculous. No scientist can claim to possess such knowledge, or to be anywhere near acquiring it. Shamans the world over know more – much more, than science does about this. So if we were smart, we should listen to what the shamans have to say.

In the corridors of academia, he says, there is neither room nor need for the supernatural. There is no space for any kind

AMNESIA

of otherworld nor any possibility that intelligent nonphysical entities could exist.

– I make no claim as to the reality of either spirits or the realms encountered in visionary trance. It's entirely possible that they are real – however you want to define that, but only accessible to our senses in altered states. It's equally conceivable that they have no fundamental reality whatsoever.

There are many other potential explanations, ranging from Jungian archetypes to projections of the imaginal. Graham says that all he can say for sure is that they are at least perceived as fully real.

– It is not an intellectual argument. It is not a matter of empirical, scientifically verifiable proof. It is quite simply an experience. Once you've had a deep and powerful encounter with the other side you can make of it what you will, but until then it's probably better to withhold judgment.

While refraining from any claims of certainty, Hancock most assuredly has his own views. These are not guidelines that he adopted from reading scriptures by other learned men, but a conviction forged in the fires of empiricism. This is the very core of shamanism – there's no one trying to tell you what's out there, you're given the means to see for yourself.

– It is my personal belief that supernatural powers and nonphysical beings exist. That human consciousness may under special circumstances be liberated from the body, enabling interaction and even learning from these entities.

This is what the communicative representatives of Amazonian, European and African flora confronted him with; the notion of the spirit world and its inhabitants being as 'real' as the definition of the word allows.

– Could they have been the ones who first ushered us into the full birth right of our humanity?

This is one of the main queries posed by *Supernatural*. Is it possible that the 'supernaturals' depicted in forgotten caves – entities we can seek audience with to this day, are the ancient teachers of mankind? Perhaps it was their doing – cultivating the spiritual in the cerebral, as man discovered how to disengage from the body. And why did it happen across the globe concurrently?

– Perhaps human evolution is more than the blind, meaningless, natural process that Charles Darwin identified. Something more purposive and intelligent, that we have barely even begun to understand.

It is, of course, difficult to discuss things like this without reflecting on their stature within the judiciary system.

– Other than breaking arbitrary rules that the state has imposed on us, personal and responsible drug use by adults is not a crime in any true moral or ethical sense. It should be of no concern to the authorities what takes place in the privacy of our own homes, where it cannot possibly do any harm to others.

For some, he says, it is a simple lifestyle choice. To others, particularly where the plants are concerned, it's a means to make contact with alternate realms and parallel dimensions – perhaps even with the divine.

– For some, they are an aid to creativity and focused mental effort. To others, they are a means to tune out from every-day cares and worries for a while.

He points out one drug that is not only encouraged by society but usually stipulated in employment contracts; caffeine. The active ingredient in coffee and tea gives a mild cognitive boost and promotes concentration and activity, which is precisely what you want from an employee.

– In all cases it seems probable that the drive to alter consciousness, from which all drug use stems, has deep genetic roots.

Graham reminds us that there are other adult lifestyle choices that used to be violently persecuted by our societies. Everything from sexual orientation and esoteric practices to a simple belief in nothing, and not to mention dabbling in the secular sciences.

– What is, after all, Western civilisation all about – what are its greatest accomplishments and highest aspirations? Most people's answers are likely to mention personal freedom before all the other splendid achievements of science, literature, technology and the economy. Individual freedom.

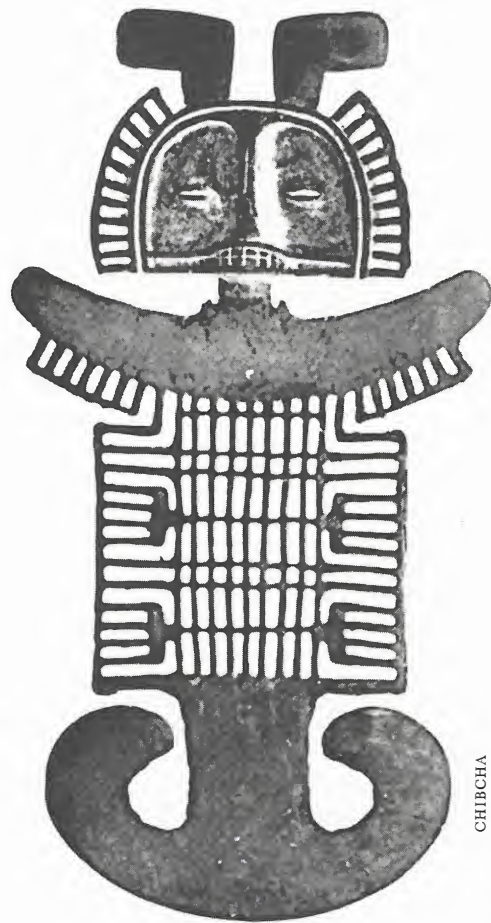
The list of liberties we enjoy today that were not available to our ancestors is a long one. Hancock says it is therefore exceedingly strange that Western civilisation in the 21st century enjoys no real freedom of consciousness.

– There is no more intimate and elemental part of the individual. At the most primal level, it is who and what we are – and if we can't claim sovereignty over our own consciousness, then we cannot in any meaningful sense be regarded as free in other aspect either.

So it has to be highly significant, he continues, that society in fact forcefully denies our right to independence in this intensely personal area.

– If we wish to deal with problems in the physical world then we cannot ignore the spiritual realm. There are immense forces infiltrating our society and narrowing our minds that work against this mission. Indeed, the great mystic William Blake was right when he wrote:

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is,
Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things
thro' narrow chinks of his
cavern."*



CHIBCHA

ANTAEUS

Vocalist MkM and guitar player Set have historically been the foundation of ANTAEUS. Today, they are the only members.

– After a few years you realise that working as a full band is just fucking annoying, says MkM, we'd rather not have to get approval from anyone else to do what we want. It's a simple arrangement; Set makes the music, we then talk about it and I do the rest.

ANTAEUS have previously stated that there will be no new releases until it rivals the intensity of "Blood Libels" from 2006.

– "Condemnation" has eight tracks and the music is even more brutal than the last album. Set's riffs sound like anger captured in distortion, so they are the perfect channel for my voice.

A session drummer was recruited for the album; Menthor, from NIGHTBRINGER and LVCIFYRE.

– He did a great job, especially considering that he was given no freedom to play the way he initially proposed. Set was very detailed in his instructions for the drum patterns.

Presenting an album seemingly out of nowhere is quite impressive and calculating statistically, one would have assumed there was another split coming – seeing how they have released no less than seven of them thus far.

– Is it that many? There are some sentimental bonds to this format, it's been my favourite since before I was a musician myself. I liked the discovery aspect – knowing that two bands wanted to be on the same piece of wax, presenting something together.

Which one is your favourite?

– Releasing that split EP with KATHARSIS in 2009 was a great honour for me. On the other hand I hate our track on it, really despise it.

The song is aptly named "Misery to the Defeated" and is ANTAEUS' latest studio release.

– It catches our mood after the 2006 tour with SECRETS OF THE MOON perfectly – and that's an ordeal I'd prefer to have purged from my memory rather than portrayed through our music.

I recall running into MkM on the London date of this tour, and he was not exactly ecstatic over the way things had gone up until that point.

– We got the offer from Steve Kuhr – a good friend and amazing tour-captain, then Phil from SECRETS OF THE MOON encouraged us to accept. Since we all knew each other from before, it made sense at the time.

Shortly before hitting the road however, they found themselves without a drummer.

– Zvn couldn't see the point of playing with people that had so much tension between them. In his other bands, they would apparently stick together and not destroy

ANTAEUS

TRULY UNDERSTANDING THE FRENCH BLACK METAL FURY THAT IS ANTAEUS MEANS LEARNING WHAT'S FUELED IT. THROUGH PARTED FLESH, MENTAL SCARS AND WANDERED HEALTH – FROM MISFORTUNE AND ADVERSITY THAT WOULD HAVE BROKEN LESSER MEN, COMES "CONDEMNATION".



themselves from the inside with alcohol, drugs, violence and uncontrolled anger. It took me a long time to accept that, but I suppose it makes sense.

Hell-bent on going forward with the tour, they recruited a late replacement.

– What sounded okay in rehearsal came out fucked up in a live situation. We performed like shit and to be honest, I think we probably killed all the work we put into "Blood Libels". It made me feel like a complete fraud.

There is at least one noteworthy memory, from the Italian date of the tour.

– Not for the worst catering ever, the one place in the entire world where they shouldn't be allowed to ruin a simple pasta dish – but due to the intense crowd that night.

By the end of the tour, the band members

had completely ceased speaking to each other.

– We also left our second guitar player in Germany.

As in, threw him off the bus?

– No need, he was on so much drugs that he stayed behind at a party in Berlin. This is a guy who spent five years on a degree in chemistry only to fry his brain with home-made pharmaceuticals. A few months after we returned he contacted Set to ask for his amp back, that's the last we heard of him.

The collaboration between Set and MkM is a companionship that's seen a fair bit of strain over the years.

– He is a storm of rage, operating through impulse and compulsion. Set has a temper and you do not want to piss him off – add to this my myriad of issues and the fact that people bore me real easy; I'm not the most laidback guy and will get angry over nothing. The same goes for him, but to a far higher degree.

I'd have thought that he might have calmed down with age, but no.

– An ever-glowing seething anger, that's the charm of the man and the reason why he still composes these furious riffs and structures.

Didn't he clobber a certain German black metal personality at a gig in Belgium?

– Sadly, it only went as far as 'almost'. For some reason and despite tons of bullshit surrounding this band, we ended up performing as openers for them in 2002. They only had two albums out at the time, and of course those demos with coins from 1988.

The frontman in question is known for having utilised highly inventive yet comically unconvincing tactics in order to corroborate his backstory of being a relic from a forgotten black metal underground of ages past.

– We had to wait until the end of the night to collect our gear and when we finally got stage access, this guy was still performing his show – setting things on fire and carrying on. He was waving around one of these self-defence teargas guns, I assume it was part of creating some fear or stress.

In the dramatic climax while leaving the stage, the gentleman in question made the unfortunate decision of discharging the teargas gun towards the back exit. Alas, the gas grenade ended up next to ANTAEUS' car parked outside – where Set was loading his amp.

– That didn't take long. He went berserk – red-eyed and coughing, and started screaming in French. He then took a bicycle chain and went straight for this genius, who grabbed his wife and held her in front of him while repeatedly shouting 'sorry'.

Fortunately, Set's proclivity for blunt force trauma does not extend to the fairer sex.

NEWBURY

– It was broken up by people who came to see what the screaming was about. What I remember most clearly are this guy's seventeen-year-old fans, patiently holding their vinyl while waiting for their idol to step out from behind his spouse.

Set was originally recruited as session bass player for ANTAEUS's very first gig back in 1998.

– He was moved to guitar after I kicked out the band-leader.

You what?

– I thought ANTAEUS could do better than a guy who didn't seem to give a shit. He got involved in some serious issues – then bragged about it and so was caught. To protect himself he asked us to lie in court, which in turn got two of my friends sent to jail on perjury charges.

He declines to comment further on the aftermath since it's 'kind of private'.

MkM and his confidants used to be pretty marginalised in the Parisian metal scene, with a lot of conflicts being contested on the internet and at local venues.

– Gigs in Paris during the nineties had an overwhelming mood of tension and violence; this was black metal to me. From beer bottles being thrown at us on stage and so on to various threats.

Have these grudges been settled by now?

– No clue, there's neither need nor will to speak to people with whom one had issues in the past. We had different points of view then, I'd presume we still do now. To be honest, most of them have disappeared and are probably enjoying weekends in the garden with their children and golden retrievers. Perhaps having a picture LP hanging on the wall as a display of nostalgia.

Somehow, ANTAEUS managed to cultivate at least a few cordial relations.

– There are individuals who are still in the scene that we've had no problems with, I tend to pay more attention to them. Though some are way too fucking active, who the hell has time for six bands?

MkM points to the fact that being in just one can be exhausting enough.

– If you manage to make it last without losing your energy or even the initial goal; congratulations. Seriously – congratulations, well done. Some even grow stronger and improve their conditions with time. Getting some constructive rewards out of it, I bet that helps in coping with all the bullshit.

I can't help but wonder if this is what he expected when embarking on a career as a musician.

– Not likely, no. I used to think that being in a band meant gathering people with a desire to work together. Everyone would get involved – be it on composition, sharing expenses, fixing up the rehearsal room, driving or whatever else.

I'm getting the distinct impression that this is not always the case.

– Barely ever. There are always some leaders and those either interested in only being part of it for a while, or these music-mercenaries that play in as many bands as possible to be on the road all the time.

ANTAEUS is the very definition of a metal band that's best experienced live, which makes it ironic how much the universe seems to conspire against them performing.

– If something can go wrong, rest assured that it will – I can't think of a single gig that went ahead without major disasters. Every single one had some fuckups that would ruin the whole thing for us, be it music-wise or just the atmosphere. We've had tours cancelled in the last minute, drummers quitting before gigs, health issues, damaged cars – and strikes of course, the joy of France.

The last but not first time I was supposed to see ANTAEUS, but didn't, would have been Hell's Pleasure in 2013.

– That time it was actually due to a German airline company. What have we come to if not even the Germans can be relied on?

Heading to a different festival they got the 'airport surprise'; an extra fee of 700 euros.

– Just for the instruments. Considering that we had only session-members, Set and I would have had to pay for everyone. No thanks – we cancelled. After that, we stopped selling merch.

Wait, what – stopped selling merch?

– We stopped. Why bother? It costs a lot and we're not one of those fancy acts selling fifty shirts.

Having such a résumé in mishaps, I shudder to imagine what the worst of the lot might be.

– Maybe Eugene, Oregon, with DEMONCY and THE HIDING. Instead of having the whole gig cancelled, we ended up playing in a coffeehouse.

What, like Starbucks?

– More like the café you'd have at the end of your street. My voice was dead due to rain, humidity and touring, so the gig was quite painful to do. Crazy turnout in the end though, which was surprising.

Believe it or not, this isn't the strangest venue that's hosted ANTAEUS.

– We once performed at the back of a kebab shop in Portugal. Which reminds me; a few years later in the same country when we opened for TESTAMENT... yeah – go figure, our second guitar player for some reason decided to head-butt me in the face half-way through the set.

Ah, this tale sounds familiar. This is the same guitarist that was later abandoned in Berlin.

– Yeah, I still get asked about this. Since I didn't really understand what the fuck was happening, the remaining set was quite

weird. LSK saw what happened and didn't move for the rest of the gig so she would see him coming in case he'd try something on her.

Marianne 'LSK' Séjourné (ex-HELL MILITIA, SECRETS OF THE MOON) was the ANTAEUS bass player from 2003 to 2008. Five years later, in 2013, Séjourné ended her own life.

– Set was really affected when that happened – I'd known her for some years prior to the ANTAEUS experience so can't say I was all that surprised. Several people from my past, all roughly the same age, decided to end it around those years.

What are your strongest memories of her?

– Apart from all the alcohol and drug abuse, I always found it fascinating what little attachment she had to material things. She kept forgetting everything, everywhere. On the tour with SECRETS OF THE MOON, not a day went by without her misplacing passport, bag, wallet or cables.

It became their nightly task to conduct a thorough search of the venue for anything she might have left behind.

– In 2003 when we were performing in New York – she arrived at the airport without her instrument, like a tourist. Luckily the guy who dropped her off had his own bass in his car, so we didn't have to borrow anything over there.

AOSOTH is another band in which MkM performs vocals, one that's been significantly more active the past few years.

– Same thing there really, every time we try to do something it is constant chaos. Like the gig in Russia; their embassy in Paris is almost a cliché, speaking neither English nor French – diplomacy at its best. The country itself is everything you'd expect and more. Greg, the promoter, has his insane side and we could see it in action.

I can attest to the latter claim.

– I predicted people passing out, bad drugs, weird security and global racism – we got it all. Bouncers in suits while we performed on stage, but afterwards anyone carrying a knife could enter the backstage without any issue.

Fortunately, the blades were primarily turned on the ones who brought them.

– I recall many bloodstains on the walls, plus a great artist – one who made designs for THE DEVIL'S BLOOD if I'm not mistaken, ended up slashing himself wide open. Good souvenirs, worst vodka ever though – and liquor that made us spit blood the day after.

This parting of the flesh is a well-documented former past-time of MkM's.

– I try to get it inked more lately, which is still damaging the skin for the same purpose.

And to what purpose is this?

– The healing process is the reward, as well as damage inflicted and felt. I never

INTERVIEW WITH MCKENNA KRIEG

did it out of anger or anything, it was mostly when feeling calm and at ease. Besides, there's something magical about blood – it's almost a fetish of mine. Really, the only thing that's permanently altered by this would be the softness of the skin.

That, and the massive scarring that covers his limbs.

– They wouldn't be especially good for Braille reading, no. Sickness made everything more complicated and not getting younger is for sure not helping either.

MkM suffers from diabetes and has not always been on top of his condition, even neglecting to take his medicine at times.

– Yeah and that made it worse obviously. Damage to the peripheral nerves have been my main concern the past three years, as well as eye-aneurysms and atrophy in my right eye. One of the results of not taking care of myself with this disease.

I trust you've come to your senses by now?

– Even if I try to handle those four injections per day, I've never gotten stabilised in the past twenty years. Now I even have to undergo check-ups to get my driving license renewed every two years. Feeling old yet?

Bitter old men with receding hairlines stand united.

– Nights are always a problem for me. I'm not able to sleep at all without pills, but if I take a Stilnox I can at least get four hours or so.

Meditation is a subject I've discussed with artists on a number of occasions recently, a proven remedy for insomnia.

– I've tried that. Nowadays I can at least disconnect whereas in the past, stilling my mind would just make my anger boil and I'd feel trapped.

I doubt the lifestyle he's known for has helped.

– I've cut down on discount alcohol these days. No more drinking a bottle of vodka per day either, same for wine and drugs. I'd rather enjoy a dark stout than get wasted with cheap shit from the supermarket.

Has your love-life been as tumultuous as everything else?

– Depends entirely what feelings are ascribed to lust or to love. The way some people explain love to me ... I've never felt anything like it, nor would I ever want to.

A passionate individual, he says, living a different way of life and under far less boundaries than most; there will most assuredly be issues. These things are not subject to rational thought, which can be a bit tricky to navigate for someone who is highly subject to impulse.

– I have of course had every imaginable scenario of drama happen to me. Some hated me for things that transpired but I suppose hurting each other is what one resonates with. But this was never done on

purpose. Maybe not enough reflection, and these things also involved a younger me.

Health concerns aside, MkM's life as a touring musician has done no wonders for his corporate career.

– I've only ever managed to work for companies with mandatory holidays, unlike some friends who've had the luxury of choosing whatever days they wanted. Never even been able to take unpaid vacation days.

Each time he'd try to negotiate for at least two weeks off to go on tour, his requests would be denied.

– I had to resign, ahead of time too for the month of notice. They were usually quite surprised and tried convincing me to postpone the days off, which obviously wasn't possible.



To add insult to injury, on one of these occasions the tour didn't even end up happening.

– We were signed to Osmose Productions back then, in order to promote "De Principii Evangelikum" (2002) they got us the slot as supporting act to DEICIDE's European tour. Everything was settled with the touring agent, Metalysée. Some weeks before the tour however, we got dropped after both...

He pauses and takes a breath.

– MYSTIC CIRCLE and CENTINEX were given the slots. I was quite bitter about it and after one drunken night of talking online with Patrick from American label Red Stream, I decided to go to the States and work for them.

After a few months in Pennsylvania, he went to New Jersey to stay with Neill Jameson from KRIEG. In retrospect, perhaps not the healthiest environment.

– Lots of fucked up memories from those months.

The last time he was forced to terminate

an employment was earlier this year, for an AOSOTH tour with MGLA and DEUS MORTEM.

– I regret doing that now. The tour itself went great, sold out almost every night and the Polish guys were perfect to get along with on the bus.

Alas, too many issues with his own performance each night sapped his motivation and killed his interest.

– One good gig – Ettlingen in Germany, then two okay ones in Paris and Colmar. The rest were perhaps the worst I've ever had to experience in regards to my own performance. This is strictly my view though, the others were quite satisfied.

It's honestly difficult to see why he subjects himself to all of this, for something he never seems to enjoy.

– A fine paradox. I've never liked touring

yet I keep trying to. Perhaps I want to experience this 'life on the road' that others describe with such enthusiasm. Who wouldn't want to be away from the daily routine; no laundry, no dishes – nothing to tidy up?

A slightly overly-romanticised picture, I take it.

– You end up in a different world alright, one where all the day's hours are linked to the bus or its driver. I cannot think of a single tour that was even remotely worth it.

July 2015; a few days after cancelling their Metal Magic appearance due to overbooked flights, ANTAEUS announced the complete cessation of live activity.

– It ended that day, as we were doing our best to find another flight. I knew something was wrong or off as soon as we arrived to the airport. It was only 8 in the morning and Set was beyond pissed off, plus hung over on whiskey. Add to that being trapped in an overcrowded place with the stress and physical pain he was in due to an illness. He lost it and told us that it was all over for him.

THE RITUAL MACABRE

This was the climax of a reluctance that had been gradually building up to eruption.

– He kept it to himself during the US tour, but we knew of course. We just didn't approach him about it; we thought that maybe things would get better over time. Needless to say, we were wrong. That was the last time all of us in that line-up were together.

This decision meant that their remaining live dates were cancelled.

– I'm still bitter that we didn't get to do Nidrosian Black Mass in Brussels. That would've been the only gig in Belgium I would have wanted to perform.

It was actually in Belgium where I first met MkM in person. In Waregem on October 31 in the year 2000, there was a bizarre indoor festival featuring among others ROTTING CHRIST, ANTAEUS,

flying from the backstage window on the top floor and crash into the asphalt below.

– I recall the mess in the backstage, that Swedish guy and the broken glass table. From our set I have some memory flashes of that 'Mad Max' Varnier guy, smoking cigarettes at the front and using both of our arms as ashtrays – as well as smashing his head against my shoes.

There was also a special guest appearance on one song – Nord from MALIGN and OFERMOD. A few hours prior, he introduced MkM to Swedish friends with the words 'This guy is brilliant, he's just like us!'

– The reverse voice of Dead (ex-MAYHEM, MORBID), he got pissed off on stage and threw the mic-stand into the audience. Some very polite guy at the front brought it back to him, as thanks for getting it in his face. Very awkward.

I still recall a remark someone made as ANTAEUS were on stage that night; 'This is the only black metal band in the world that gets away with saying 'Go' in a song.'

– All vocals on "Cut your Flesh and Worship Satan" (the 2000 debut) were recorded in one or two takes, max. It was spontaneous and could have been any word – 'fire', 'fuck', 'death' ... but ended up being 'go'. Not a second thought was ever given.

The song in question, "Inner War", was covered by AOSOTH on the 2009 "Ashes of Angels".

– I can no longer stand my vocals on the first two ANTAEUS albums. "Devotee" and "Inner War" are tracks I should be proud of but hearing the original versions makes me grind my teeth. With ANTAEUS on hold at the time, AOSOTH was performing this track live and it made sense to redo it in the studio. In the end though, the live version is still superior.

MkM does not foresee that live activity will be resumed once "Condemnation" is out; which is November 18 and by Norma Evangelium Diaboli.

– Considering Set's health, coupled with the fact that he made it perfectly clear that he never wants to be on stage again – I somehow doubt it. It wouldn't make sense playing without him either, nor do I think he'd ever approve of anyone else performing his songs.

What is your current relationship to black metal?

– I've kept my vision as pure as it was in the early days; the trick is to avoid dealing with idiots and parasites. All scenes have their leeches – any fucking scene, any field or any job. Anything can be ruined, all should be ruined.

With such a sordid past, predicting the future can't be easy – but I'm deathly curious how the perpetual pessimist envisions it.

– Yeah, he says, I'll be wise for once and shut up instead of blurt-ing out the first thing that comes to mind. Too many factors that could take place, time will tell.

ADDENDUM – FEBRUARY 2017

After publishing the article online, I received an email from Phil of SECRETS OF THE MOON:

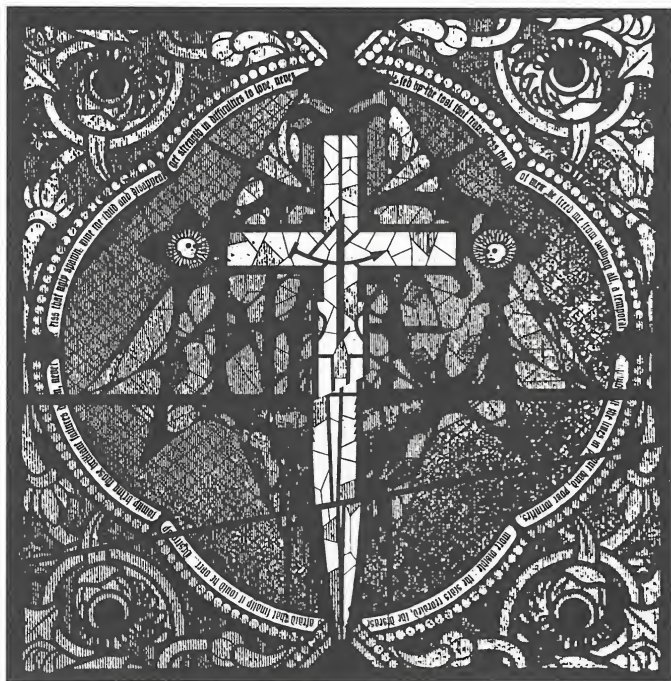
"This brings back lots of memories. I remember the ANTAEUS guys sleeping at my place (me somewhere else) and when I picked them up the next morning they checked their guitar player's bags if he stole something from me. Weird."

Needless to say, this stirred my curiosity to the extent that I had to ask MkM about it. When I speak to him, he has recently arrived at the venue to play Icelandic festival Oration MMXVII with AOSOTH. As tradition would have it in a live situation, disaster has struck.

– Our SPD-S sampler is damaged, as is Saroth's guitar and BST's pedals – so kind of pissed at the moment. But we'll get it sorted out, thanks to other bands.

Bidding them good fortune, we proceed to the thieving trivia.

– Ah, the joy of having a real kleptomaniac around you... we didn't notice right away, I guess the first stolen items were more



ARKHON INFAUSTUS as well as Swedish TRIUMPHATOR's first and only gig. Another band performing, one that had just put out their debut album, was WATAIN; their set was later released on the "The Ritual Macabre" live tape.

– It was promoted by that guy from Tragic Empire touring agency, in cooperation with Drakkar. Terribly organised, always having a victim to blame instead of admitting their own mistakes. They arrived late, venue wasn't paid for, sound guy wasn't paid. And, of course – neither were the bands.

I know one band that was paid.

– Ah, yes. I remember Arioch and Tena from TRIUMPHATOR having a delicate talk with that Tragic Empire guy about the money they were owed.

The first thing I laid eyes on when I got there was a drum-kit being loaded into a car and then driven away.

– A local band had been added to the bill, just to provide a back-line for everyone else to use – though no one had bothered telling them. When that realisation hit them they just packed up and left.

In all fairness, not all mischief that night was caused by the promoters – a number of unsavoury bands made various contributions. I left the venue for a few hours and when I got back in the afternoon, the first thing I saw was a huge mayonnaise jar come

ANTAEUS

or less symbolic and of no value or real use. It could be an ashtray, CD's – anything. It got to the point where he considered upgrading his luggage, so he could hide more stuff without arousing suspicion.

Unsurprisingly, this turns out to be the head-butting guitar player who was subsequently left behind on German soil in a narcotic stupor.

– From clothes to whatever else you can imagine; room decorum, wine bottles, music equipment – even drums despite him being only a guitarist. His girlfriend was the same, they somehow took pride in wearing garments neither of them had paid for. Dressing in an entirely stolen outfit obviously doesn't always match visually.

I'm only now starting to entertain the notion that perhaps Phil wasn't exaggerating after all.

– Certainly not, this was a routine we had to do every day. It was annoying because we were travelling in a huge van full of equipment and suitcases, which provides numerous hidden places for stashing loot.

To complicate matters further, most of the tour's accommodation was provided by either the venue or promoters lending them their residence.

– I couldn't have cared less if he had been stealing shit from hotel rooms, but each time it would take place where people were helping us out so that did indeed get old with spectacular haste. The largest items he stole... that would be the stuffed animal or a big half-finished wooden box.

Where the hell did that come from?

– I really have no clue where he got that, seriously no idea. As fate would have it, our backdrop was then stolen in Italy afterwards...

Now that I think about it, this reminds me of another treasure from the seemingly bottomless vault of ANTAEUS anecdotes. I wonder if this might be the same individual who thought it would be clever to steal a Portuguese flag – on stage, in Portugal.

– He didn't exactly steal it, but in the beginning of the gig tore it off the wall and dropped it on the floor – leading to parts of the audience insulting and threatening us. Clearly the good idea of the night.

Since we're already conversing, I seize the opportunity to inquire how the response to "Condemnation" has been.

– It's still too early for deep analysis, but most reviews and feedback made it clear that we were neither aiming for a "Blood Libels" part two, nor willing to create something different... after all, we had a ten-year gap in-between the previous album and this one.

MkM observes that many bands who feel obliged to expand their musical spectrum tend to justify their sudden open-mindedness with 'maturity'.

– We were done maturing by the time of our second album, and we've been ageing disgracefully ever since. Mid-life crisis kept us in check and this is where we'll stay.

The stalwart cynic grudgingly concedes that the album appears to have roused at least some interest.

– Despite denying all interviews, and as a result getting very little coverage in both underground and mainstream metal media. Obviously there's no hype around us or anything. To this day, I still have people asking me if we're going to follow up "Blood Libels" with a new recording... as if the split with KATHARSIS or the new album never existed.

One would think that an expedient amendment of this situation could be facilitated by simply giving an interview or two.

– So said most people who proposed them actually, a few even offering cover stories – all reacting with varying degrees of surprise when we declined, some clearly offended.

Why the media shyness then?

– In previous interviews, ones which caught my interest, I could let myself speak of anything I had in mind at that particular moment. Talking for hours or writing several pages long replies, only to have them cut together into a few sentences completely out of con-

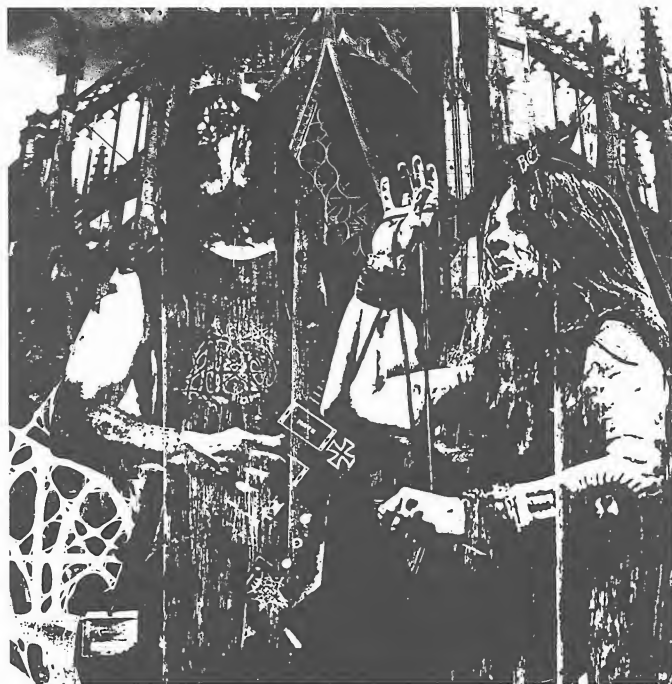
text. Seriously, it's a complete waste of time – just like having to visit the shrink to express out loud what lies inside.

Expression in general, claims the man portrayed in one of the longest features I've ever written, is not his strong suit.

– My lack of expressive abilities on personal interests and ideas dwelling in my mind, even with people close to me – be it in everyday life or through correspondence, could be overcome only through moments where I took the time to sit down, cut all noise around and just let it all out.

This spontaneous vitriolic emission, he adds, is the same approach he takes to lyrics.

– There could be months, or even years, where I just do not feel a thing despite being in the conditions... but one day it's there, demanding release.



I imagine committing to media duties is a fairly time-consuming venture?

– Heh, back in the nineties up to mid-2000s I would have spent several hours every day answering letters, emails and so on. Now when I hear individuals complaining about this or that being time-consuming... well, yeah – I got the point a while ago already. Those hours at the post office shipping letters and packages – trying to handle everything but of course fucking up sometimes.

I'm also curious what their label has to say about this attitude.

– NoEvDia has the right approach, they respected our decision. We discussed the matter since we used to answer almost every interview, and the fact that we would become one of those formations willing to stay out of exposure could be damaging to the album release. Perhaps also giving the wrong idea that ANTAEUS became elitist, or whatever term comes to mind.

Arrogance, perchance?

– That would not fit, there is no arrogance here – we mostly just do not care, it's a waste of time. There's anger and there is tension and pain in what we do, but it's not linked to a scene or any media. Just exposing what's inside and letting it all out; now it's done, released and behind us. Like a scar, a mark on the flesh, a damage somewhere. Time to build or destroy elsewhere.

– I certainly don't think it was unavoidable – he was at a crossroads of sorts, a tipping-point. It's hard to speculate over Euronymous' influence over his decision, because at the same time they were really tight-knit in their ideas and visions and commitment to what they were doing with MAYHEM. Very close; it was a complex relationship.

Did you ever meet Euronymous in person?

– I never had the chance, despite being invited to go visit him. My plan was to join them for a gig in France but it ended up cancelled. It's a shame of course, it would have been nice to see them live. We had various plans, Pelle and I, of me visiting them. We were all poor, so the execution and logistics were messy on all sides.



Morbid: Dr. Schitz and Gehenna above, Drutten and Dead below.

It's evident that Dr. Schitz still finds it difficult to speak about these matters, even after twenty-six years.

– The time between sixteen and nineteen was incredibly formative in terms of which friends I made and what records I listened to, it was as if my skull was wide open for everything I did and said. As a result, what happened left deep imprints on me.

Having first met at an outdoor TREAT concert in 1986, the pair soon become fast friends. Dr. Schitz says that one of the first things he noticed was Pelle's curiosity and acceptance of personal oddities that usually rendered him feeling socially awkward.

– He could see and appreciate them for what they were. We could relate to each other's quirks in ways I had previously not done with any other person, which to me was immensely profound. I was able to be myself and even enjoy these idiosyncrasies – it was a great revelation which I'll always be infinitely grateful for.

Do you think what ultimately happened had any bearing on your career choice?

– It's hard to disregard that we both took on prophetic alter ego names that went on to be fulfilled. Him passing away and me be-

coming a psychologist – I'd like to think it reflects a kind of honesty, a sincerity... not in a consciously aware or methodical way, but just exploring who we were. I suppose you could say that being such an original himself, he liked to spot unique qualities in others and in that process came his recognition and acceptance. It sounds quite high-brow when I describe it with these words but he was both down-to-earth and funny.

The question is then how Dr. Schitz believes Pelle's short life should be remembered, and if appropriate, celebrated.

– Being quite the outsider himself, he appreciated weirdness and people who stood out from the crowd. He detested phonies, poseurs, and wannabes. Be yourself, appreciate the innate uniqueness even if it isn't 'cool'. Pelle was severely bullied and almost killed for not being deemed cool enough by some assholes.

At ten years of age Ohlin was beaten so badly that his spleen ruptured – this is what led to the near-death experience which shaped such a big part of the Dead persona.

– So stand up against bullying, stand up for those who are different – that's what could have helped him a lot during certain points in his life. Just be yourself – shun all forms of group-pressure like the plague. And of course, remove the post-mortem photo whenever possible.

While Dead was in earnest almost fanatical about his perception of real black metal, Dr. Schitz says it's a common misconception that he chose his company after the same criteria.

– He never asked or expected me to be true black metal. It was never an issue, and certainly not a prerequisite to earn his respect and friendship. And to be fair, if you look at proponents like VENOM, who created this grand vision that obviously played such a significant role in the genesis of black metal – they certainly weren't into Satanism or the occult. I'm not aware of that many from the Swedish scene who were performing rituals back in the day either.

Even those who so wanted to would have had severe difficulties in coming across any kind of instruction on how to summon anything. Dr. Schitz recalls a time when he accompanied Pelle to a New Age bookshop, where the vocalist ordered *The Satanic Bible*.

– Despite months of waiting, I don't believe he ever got it. It was essentially all up to your boy-room imagination but at the same time, everything was very heartfelt when it came to dedication and acting it out – utterly sincere. In many ways, what we were doing was spontaneous and almost shamanistic in nature.

Black metal was never especially ritualistic from the beginning, he says, and that's relevant to keep in mind.

– In that, my understanding of 'true' is much more in spirit rather than doctrinal paradigms. Obviously you don't need to do ceremonial work to create fantastic, amazing black metal like VENOM. I'm sure there are people performing rites while simultaneously producing mediocre music so it's not a necessity for the art, per se. Then again, I don't consider myself a black metal person – I was never on the inside of that.

As an example, he confesses to having only worn an inverted cross a single day of his life; at the first MORBID gig, and then never again.

– To me, the overturned cross and a lot of the symbolic aspects of black metal are related to Satanism, which in turn stems from the same monotheistic, Abrahamic religions which always left me cold. I feel no kinship with it whatsoever, it's completely alien to me. I applaud the diabolical insurgency that comes with it though, I'm all for the war in heaven and overthrowing Churchianity in our culture.

Dr. Schitz finds it curious how so many portray a falsified image of themselves, in order to affirm their personality in a subculture where authenticity is supposedly paramount.

– From a purely psychoanalytical standpoint, this is quite interesting. Forming a more coherent black metal movement also seems to me a paradox in term, but then again I make no claims of being an authority on the matter. As for a genuine spiritual tradition...

one can map out the subtle anatomy of such paths in different ways.

A stable and well-developed tradition rests on three pillars, he explains. Firstly you have Revelation – the divine truth, Logos, axiom; a philosophy or scripture. Then there's Link, which can be the lineage, teacher, and outer, inner, or secret guru.

– Lastly, the final pillar is Brotherhood – or perhaps more appropriately in this context; Pack. Your fellow travellers are the only ones you can relate to, and they are imperative because you will go through nigredo phases in which you tend to lose it. The Pack are fellow inductees who can support you in ways others can't, which could literally save your sanity.

In a magical context, as well as the entheogenic, the nigredo phases are times in which the practitioner is made to face the dark night of the soul – times of crippling doubt, dread of failure, paranoia and signs of impending madness. While companions are unable to directly intervene, they can provide the moral support required to persevere.

– Black metal is quite the outlier of a path, and you'll be hard-pressed to find a clear example of Revelations. I think the best examples of Link are more along the lines of mental states, or the personified idolatry that the likes of Quorthon (BATHORY), Dead, or Chronos (VENOM) achieved as artists – not as actual spiritual practitioners.

The Brotherhood, or Pack, is not easily found – in part because of the rare representation of Revelation and Link.

– Thus; black metal is not a clear-cut spiritual tradition per se – but perhaps more of a shamanistic art form of sorts. Yet it makes perfect sense that it draws upon the power and inspiration of the esoteric. Neurologically, truly inspired black metal derives from the dark powers of the brain which reside in the lower strata – the brain stem, sometimes referred to as the reptilian brain.

Heavily represented in occult teachings and iconography; the basal ganglia – a part of the cerebral that's associated with various functions such as impulsive behaviour, movement, and emotion. Dr. Schitz outlined his theory on the neurological basis of black metal in a brief essay featured in the 2015 art book, *Unfathom*, by Ronald Zieger.

– If you want a true spiritual practice, this is not something that



August 17, 1987 – on his seventeenth birthday, Dr. Schitz ran into Venom while having breakfast at his London hotel, and was invited to join their evening festivities.

can be summoned on command. You must have Revelation and Link – ersatz just won't do. But obviously you can create great and authentic black metal without a formal praxis, referring again back the mentioned icons.

In 1996, Dr. Schitz relocated to the United States with his American wife at the time.

– We were looking for somewhere in the US that was affordable but also had culture, which made New Orleans a perfect selection. It was a very special time in my life, I was able to experience real poverty both in our local neighbourhood but also on a personal level – something I had never dealt with in Sweden. Poverty is like slow motion violence that can deform you, it's quite the test of character; I grew to develop a lot of respect for those who are able to face it.

He describes living in a predominately black, very poor neighbourhood as a truly humbling learning-experience.

– I had to swallow a lot of pride in not only applying for a job at McDonald's, but then getting turned down. I imagine a long-haired Swede would simply have been too weird in an all-black restaurant. I did however manage to get five dollars for each voodoo doll I made for the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum, crafted from material I found in parks.

Having been involved in the arcane his entire adult life, it would have been almost rude not to take up voodoo while in New Orleans.

– I have to say – apart from Himalayan tantrism, voodoo is really the most direct powerful system I've ever encountered. I have absolutely zero natural talent for it, but it holds a creative power which earned my deepest respect.

His newfound interest lead to the formation of a new ensemble, of sorts, the first since Ohlin's passing.

– I was involved in recording a ritual together with a *houngan* – a voodoo priest; literally a Vietnam War veteran on steroids whose magical name was TamR. A really wild guy, complete savage. It was a strange and oddly engineered recording, produced as a fundraiser for the temple we were building.

Mr. TamR owned a building with several apartments, housing a multitude of eccentric residents.

– I remember when one tenant left his apartment, and we went in to clean it up. There were buckets of vomit left on the floor, each very neatly dated over a couple of weeks. Things like that were going on.

The priest also owned a 'voodoo house', frequented by a similarly unsavoury cast of characters.

– One guy was later arrested for murder, we had a girl using new names every week, then there was the bouncer who poured gasoline



Abaddon, Dr. Schitz, and Cronos

CHÖD

outside the house and threatened to burn it down, etcetera. Ten months after recording the album, TamR ritually blew his head off in a fully ceremonial suicide performed in robes and before an altar.

Ever since – there is a half-joking, half-serious wisdom among Dr. Schitz's friends concerning singing in bands with him, given his colourful track record.

– New Orleans is a very... the veil is thin, and the dark powers always stir. It's where some people come to die, a place others go to party, and an abyss into which some will inevitably sink after settling there. It almost defies linguistic depiction, but the sheer violence and brutal misery you'll find in some corners, side-by-side with tremendous joy and buoyancy – it's all quite remarkable.

1999; three years after moving to New Orleans, Dr. Schitz was advised to turn to Tibetan Buddhism by a voodoo priestess and qliphotic magician named Mishlen Lindén.

– Gradually, over a few years, I found myself fully at home and committed. My attraction was intuitive and strong. Actually, I first proclaimed myself a Buddhist at eleven years of age – but neither I nor my mother really knew what that meant. It was then dropped, but kept finding its way back to me until I was able to connect the dots.

In the lineage of Tibetan Buddhism that Dr. Schitz adheres to, Nyingma, the spiritual practice of Chöd is an integral aspect. Known also as 'Cutting Through the Ego', it's a form of tantric and meditative ritual with the aim of summoning and then surrendering to unspeakable fear.

– It is especially but not exclusively geared towards to all forms of demons and gods, and has marked dramaturgical parallels to Tibetan sky burials. 'Demons' are used here in the widest sense of the word – ranging from physical handicaps, mental blocks, and spiritual hindrances to actual intelligences. The dynamic combination of high tantric techniques are practised together in a way that is truly mind-blowing. Each time I think of it, I find myself in such utter awe.

Would you care to enlighten us on the basics?

– It's quite vulgar for a rookie like myself to describe Chöd in such a brief and flawed way, but since you asked, here it goes: After having performed the preliminary meditative practices, you separate mind from flesh – leaving behind your conventional, relative existence and identity whose primary abode is your body.

In this act, which produces a heightened state of awareness characterised by great lucidity, the identification to present life and all



of its contents and patterns is severed – one effectively faces death head-on.

– You assume the form of a Wrathful Yidam (deification by assumption of 'meditation god/form'), whose manifestation reflects your ultimate mind. Welcome to Chö Yül – the realm of Chöd, where the body is offered up for consumption in a tantric feast according to the particular lineage being performed.

The styles are typically rather graphic and have names such as Shaking Meat off the Bone, One Which Hits the Mouth of Demons, Feast of the Corpse, The Corpse Thrown as Food, Gift of Human Skin, and Face of the Skull.

– Next you invite the guests, whom are usually from all realms of existence – ranging from gods to demons and everything in-between. The invitees are fed in one or several banquets, according to their mode of existence and particular neurosis.

Instead of going into magical battle with the demons, the philosophy is to reverse the flow of energies and feed them with your innermost precious – body and identity. Or perhaps, your attachment to them.

– Physical location has a particular importance in Chöd, and once you achieve some mastery you set out to practice in Nyenthsa – the haunted and frightening places. Chöd will allow you unprecedented access to its hidden dimensions, denizens, and energies.

Extending these invitations, he claims, will often generate demonic uprisings; poltergeist, vivid rendezvous with the spirits of one's nightmares and all sorts of frightening experiences as the demons try to overpower you.

– Chöd dreams are in a class all of their own, they are that distinct. Fear is of utmost importance in this tantrically transformative process. The demons will do all within their power to trigger your neurotic patterns – but as long as you remain unmoved, their attacks will surmount to nothing. They will exhaust themselves and might even fall under your sway.

This is the basic grammar of Chöd, which is then adapted in short practices as well as vast cycles in different formats and modes. Dr. Schitz describes it is a powerful, complete, and swift but steep path.

– The importance of location and how one relates to spirits is drawn from shamanism, as is the drumming. However, Chöd radically differs in also using human bones as instruments – effectively breaking a near-universal taboo of handling the deceased. There is of course much, much more to this, but I think this will suffice for context.

With the mention of shamanism, it occurs to me that this



approach sounds like the common advice of handling a psychedelic ‘bad trip’ – surrendering to the horror and facing it head-on, instead of trying to resist it or distract oneself.

– Exactly. The greatest treasures lie in that existential staredown, the fear is not meant to be overcome; you must open up, surrender and sacrifice yourself to it. In reality, what you're offering up is your own inhibitions – nothing else.

Conversely, he adds, an entheogenic foray could also be impeded if one instead struggles to cling on to other emotions, such as euphoria.

– Such efforts must also cease – this is exactly the meaning of cutting through your bonds to gods, and all that we are attached to. It's amazing to think that Machik Labdrön came up with this in Tibet more than a thousand years ago, as woman beggar wandering a man's world.

He stresses empathetically that Chöd is nothing one should engage in after having read up on it online.

– I will adamantly and categorically state that you simply must have authentic empowerment by an actual master of great integrity, and practice only with the right motivation. Also, having the correct outlook is absolutely critical. In this case, it derives from the *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is perhaps most succinctly summarised by the line ‘form is emptiness, emptiness is form’. Otherwise, it’s perverted

Chöd – which in fact has been documented for centuries. It's nothing new, but utterly dangerous and stupid all the same.

You mentioned the Chöd dreams before, is your dream-life a source of interest?

– Absolutely. At the very top of mystical experiences is my initial grand lucid dream, which came after my first ever attempt at dream yoga. Being fully present in a reality conjured only by my own subconscious made me realise the scope of the mortal mind.

Everything takes place within this domain, he says, even though what happens in waking life appears in interdependence with the reality 'out there'.

– Connecting to that mind is simultaneously the essence of human existence, the apprehender of experience itself. It initiated a shift in my worldview that can best be described as Copernican in scope.

Meaning – the realisation that all earthly matter revolves around the solar mind, and not the other way around.

– If you don't get to know yourself intimately – within as well as without, you are doomed to be driven by the same old patterns that are etched into your being. You will spend aeons trying to control and fix the world and your experiences, which is a bass ackwards approach to life.

NO FASHION RECORDS

THE ARCHITECT BEHIND TWO STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE
SWEDISH METAL UNDERGROUND SHARES HIS STORY – ONE
BURDENED BY DEATH AND DECEIT, SERVING AS A
REMINDER OF THE FICKLE NATURE OF
LIFE AND HOW EVERYTHING CAN
BE SWEEPED AWAY BY THE
STROKE OF A
HAND.

– The seeds were sown in 1988, says Tomas Nyqvist, I was fourteen years old and lived in a small town with nothing to do. I'm useless as a musician but really wanted to do something and take an active part in the underground.

Like most of his peers, he'd stay up to date by reading the contemporary publications that would prove essential for the emerging scene.

– Especially *Morbid Mag* and *Slayer Mag*.
They were my inspiration to start one of my
own.

Fuelled by a rabid, obsessive hunger for everything related to obscure metal, Tomas founded *Putrefaction Magazine*.

– I was one of these kids that didn't really attend school all that much. When they found out I was doing a 'zine, I was put in one of these adjusted study programmes where I could work on it during school hours. They also offered to cover the printing expenses.

Considering the time – with W.A.S.P. being proclaimed a national emergency on state television, it's quite ironic that Swedish tax payer money would be funding the growth of a now world-renowned death metal underground. The fledgling entrepreneur's first course of action was to send questions to some of his favourite Swedish

bands – a few of those that responded were CARNAGE, ABHOTH, and EMBALMED.

– Once the material was ready, I arranged and cut-and-pasted everything together, then drew the logos with a black sharpie. I thought it was really cool.

The first issue was printed in one hundred copies and released in the autumn of 1989.

– ‘How the hell am I to get rid of a hundred ’zines?’ I thought.

Despite his tender age, Tomas was a devout tape trader and corresponded with people from all over the world. After printing flyers heralding the birth of *Putrefaction*, he began including them in his cassette trafficking. And so word spread through the underground.

– I'll never forget the moment my first order came in, two copies for someone in the Netherlands. I was just amazed that some Dutch guys wanted to read my magazine; it was an incredible feeling – fourteen years old and I'd just earned 40 kronor.

Note that in 1989, 40 Swedish kronor had the same buying power as 68 kronor do

today. That's 8 US dollars, or 7 euros. The second issue came pretty soon after the first one – February 1990.

– Sitting at home, hammering away at my type-writer – this was obviously long before the age of computers. I started sending questions to American and European bands and even managed to get an *AUTOPSY* interview, I was ecstatic despite it being little beyond ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers.

The big break came later that year with the third issue, which featured MAYHEM and MORBID frontman Pelle 'Dead' Ohlin on the cover.

– The interview turned out pretty good, Tomas comments, considering my limited English skills – he also sent me a bunch of photos and drawings that I ended up using. I must have sold five hundred copies of that issue, mostly because of him. This was in 1990 – one year before ... well, he'd just moved to Norway. I think.

Conveniently, the conversation is graced by the presence of interactive fact-checking in the form of MORBID bass player; Dr. Schitz.

– No, he interjects, Pelle left for Norway in the beginning of 1988.

— Right, says Tomas, he'd gained a huge following in the underground by then. Nowhere near where it is now obviously, with

NO FASHION RECORDS

Hollywood movies and everything.

The interview features some scathing commentary about the state of death metal, citing the use of Bermuda shorts as an example.

– Life metal, Dr. Schitz observes, in Pelle's perspective.

– Exactly, Tomas continues, he was incredibly anti-everything that was commercial. He wanted to be as underground as he could possibly be.

Dr. Schitz says that his friend became all the more ambivalent as to what he wanted to achieve, at least in this life.

– I remember discussing a MORBID single we'd planned; one moment he wanted to print twenty copies and only have it sold in some underground store in Greece, next thing you knew he was talking about two thousand copies. Towards the end, he kept going increasingly back and forth.

While there was a steady stream of grand declarations from the already notorious MAYHEM, there was very little actually happening in regards to output.

– Simultaneously, he adds, many of the Swedish bands that Pelle had pissed on in interviews were drinking beer in nightliners – being driven to shows across Europe. He had missed that train, and it was really starting to eat away at him.

Over the three years he was part of MAYHEM, they played only four gigs outside Norway – three in Germany and one in Turkey.

– It certainly wasn't for loss of trying, Tomas says, they attempted to put together several tours. At the same time, everything had to be so completely anti that it ended up falling through. Dead never did manage to get his head straight about it.

In a cruel twist of fate, the fervent adversary of anything mainstream is now part of mandatory metal history.

– It's so bizarre with that upcoming Hollywood movie, says Dr. Schitz, this Lords of Chaos about Norwegian black metal by Ridley Scott. I'm so emotionally invested in this that I can barely think straight, but I was talking to Pelle's brother and mentioned to him how much it bothered me.

Ohlin's sibling made an interesting point; without compromising or selling out by anyone's standards, the persona of Dead is now getting more recognition than he could have possibly fathomed.

– I hadn't thought of it that way, this solved the dilemma he was grappling with. It was a genuine quality of his, this uncompromising integrity.

Before leaving friends, MORBID, and family behind in Stockholm at nineteen years of age, Ohlin was already renowned for his total dedication to the fundamental concepts of black and death metal. Once he partnered up with Øystein 'Euronymous'

Aarseth, MAYHEM's guitar player, his fervour reached obsessive lengths.

– I met him once, says Tomas, Euronymous that is. One day in the early nineties he showed up at my place together with Faust (EMPEROR).

The duo needed records for their store back in Oslo, Helvete.

– 'Sure', I said, 'what are you after?' They wanted fifty copies of each No Fashion release; 'alright', I said, 'and what about the money?' I was told it would be sent to me, which unfortunately never happened.

– Euronymous was even more hopeless as a businessman than you were, Dr. Schitz notes, I can assure you that he had every intention of reimbursing you, and didn't mean to rip you off.

He recalls a cunning plan the Oslo boys had concocted, of making some quick money by putting out a METALLICA bootleg.



– One thousand copies ordered and but never collected since they couldn't scrape together the funds to pay for them. I think it's safe to say that you were financially savvy in comparison.

– Of course, says Tomas, I don't really care. I loved MAYHEM so it was huge for me to even have them as guests in my home.

Ohlin later sent Tomas a rehearsal tape recorded in the old house he'd moved in together with Euronymous and MAYHEM drummer Hellhammer. This is probably the recording that ended up released as "Out from the Dark" in 1996.

– I worshipped that tape, it was so fucking good. They kept claiming that they were about to record an album, but nothing ever happened.

Something that fortunately did happen was the sole MAYHEM studio recording with Dead on vocals; the songs "Freezing Moon" and "Carnage" from the "Projections of a Stained Mind" compilation. It was organised and designed by Dr. Schitz, and released by Chicken Brain Records in 1991.

– When I was putting it together, he says, I nagged Pelle endlessly to get them to record – and finally they did.

Tomas points out that we should all be grateful for Dr. Schitz's pestering resilience, as these aural treasures would have never existed otherwise.

– I remember the first time I heard those songs, says Tomas, and just ... wow, fucking hell. I'd listen to them over and over again, and was really looking forward to the album. They had already decided what the title was going to be.

"De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas" was released in May, 1994 – at this point, Pelle Ohlin and Øystein Aarseth were both dead.

Whereas popular lore attributes Ohlin's stage name to a previous brush with death as a child, Dr. Schitz has conflicting memories.

– Is there an interview with Pelle where he says that 'Dead' came from his near-death experience? I highly doubt that.

The young Ohlin was subjected to brutal bullying in school, and when he was ten years old he was beaten so badly that his spleen ruptured.

– He went home to try to get some rest and was later found unconscious by his stepmother, who was a nurse. His pulse was weak but I doubt it ever stopped completely; he was rushed to the emergency ward and operated on. I don't think he was ever pronounced dead though.

Dr. Schitz says he only found out the actual story several years after Pelle had passed away.

– The thing is, he never spoke about it. He even lied to his friends about the scar, claiming it was from eating poisonous mushrooms and having to get surgery, but that was the only thing he ever lied about. In my opinion, he couldn't bring himself to talk about what had really happened.

Trauma victims will often desperately try to avoid the source of the distress – and in doing so, some will instead end up becoming fixated with it.

– And so, he continues, Pelle became obsessed with death. This obviously contributed to the choice he ultimately made but it's not why he did it. He was alone in that shitty house, it was Easter and of all his friends were either with girlfriends or family.

MAYHEM was going nowhere, he continues, Pelle had begun starving himself and was displaying self-harm tendencies.

– He stopped taking care of himself and was no longer even washing at this point. I think we can establish without any reasonable doubt that he was deeply depressed.

Dr. Schitz says that in most cases of depression-related suicide, it doesn't happen when the afflicted is at the absolute lowest. It usually follows a brief alleviation of the pain, in the wake of a glimpse of light.

– In this case, it was his decision to move back home to Sweden. Pelle had applied for art school and we had started rehearsing with MORBID again, his mother later told me he was incredibly excited to be back playing with Gehenna (guitars) and me.

Then why didn't he follow through?

DEATH METAL

– While there was a chance of real change just around the corner, I don't think it felt all that appealing to him.

Especially coming back home empty-handed after all this time, when many of his former friends had become successful musicians.

– When we rehearsed, I imagine he must have realised that things were never going to go back to the way they once were – we had grown up, and had jobs. No one that knew Pelle would claim a fascination for death was decisive in his choice, he was simply deeply depressed.

Dr. Schitz stresses that these revelations should in no way detract from Ohlin's artistic integrity.

– His portrayal was genius, genuine and heartfelt – but much of its driving force was a lot more tragic than what's been projected by outsiders and ascribed to him by Øystein. From our conversations and correspondence I got the impression that Øystein treated him like shit, he bullied him – something Pelle did not handle well. I think taking those fucking photos says more than words can ever convey in this regard.

Pelle 'Dead' Ohlin ended his own life on April 8, 1991; his body was found by Aarseth, who took the now infamous pictures. Dr. Schitz dismisses the claims by the latter that Ohlin's demise was in any way influenced by the state of the scene as laughable.

– This notion of the suicide having anything to do with corruption of black metal is incredibly naïve. Pelle was miserable and despite planning new beginnings back in Sweden, he simply couldn't see a way out of it.

After the success of the fourth issue,

Tomas felt there was a real demand for his publication.

– My English was terrible but *Putrefaction* was somehow a hit. I started focusing on US death metal and the South American scene – six hundred copies were printed of the fifth issue and they sold out straight away.

Many of them went to smaller distributors, such as labels who also had their own distro. Once they'd sold all their stock, they'd send Tomas back the money.

– It kept going like that. I found a place that could print the magazine in binding, with a proper spine and everything.

It meant a higher cost-per-sale, but that didn't matter as long as it improved the publication. Besides, it was still good money for a teenage metalhead.

– The sixth and seventh issues sold one thousand copies each, that's when No Fashion came into the picture. I had to put the magazine in hibernation while I dealt with the record label.

The tragic tale of No Fashion Records began in early 1992, when Tomas came across an obscure Dutch black metal band called BESTIAL SUMMONING.

– It was the most chaotic shit I'd ever heard in my life, I could barely make out a single instrument. I instantly knew that I had to release it.

Tomas had just turned eighteen and thus got access to an inheritance from his mother, who had passed away when he was younger.

– Together with the *Putrefaction* money, this was enough for a starting capital. I printed one thousand LP's in Norway, at the same place Euronymous used for Deathlike Silence Productions.

Today, "The Dark War has Begun" is a treasured rarity but at the time it wasn't exactly flying off the shelves. This was also at a time when the CD format was seeing its big breakthrough, rendering its predecessors near-obsolete.

– People were like, 'what the hell is this?' I could clearly peddle my publication but this record with its dreadful cover artwork was an entirely different matter. I think it sold one hundred copies in the first year, but I never gave up.

Tomas found Norwegian death metal band FESTER and released their album "Winter of Sin" on CD, which sold reasonably well. Then came the MARDUK debut – "Dark Endless", released in December 1992.

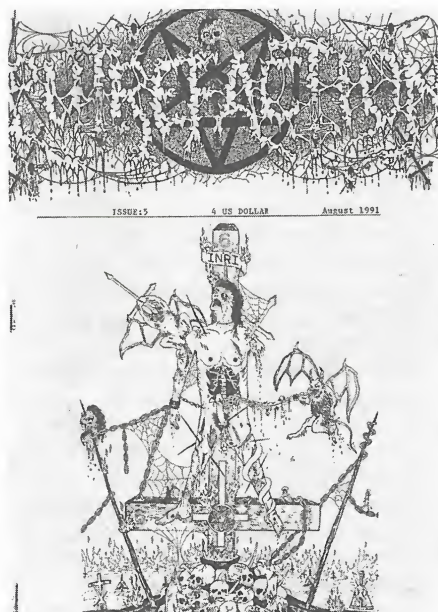
– Morgan (Håkansson, guitar) sent me a demo that I thought was fantastic so I offered to release their record. That's where things really took off. We printed one thousand CD's and five hundred vinyl; it was a dead format in those days but this was an album that needed an LP version.

One year later, No Fashion Records released DISSECTION's iconic debut, "The Somberlain". Like Pelle Ohlin, the band's frontman Jon Nödtveidt is no longer with us in the flesh.

– Jon was a great guy, says Tomas, really funny. When he lived in Eskilstuna for a period around 1993, we'd catch up almost every weekend. Then ... well, something happened within him – he began drifting towards new ideas and kept a different company.

– I know the feeling, says Dr. Schitz.

– We lost contact for a while, but towards the end we were back on track. Anyway, I got to know him in 1989, through his zine



KATATONIA

Mega Mag.

The two editors were the same age and started talking regularly over the phone.

– He sent me their 1991 “The Grief Prophecy” demo. DISSECTION had a more traditional death metal sound with growling vocals in those days, but filled with these fantastic melodies – the potential was there for all to see.

Tomas says he has no idea if it had any impact, but he actually mentioned to Jon that he should try out different vocals than the deep growls.

– The year after, he sent me a rehearsal tape with a few new songs. It floored me completely, it was so fucking good – I rang him immediately and expressed interest in releasing an album, which he accepted.

“The Somberlain” was recorded in Unisound Studios during five days in March 1993, under the guidance of its proprietor Dan Swanö.

– It cost me 6 000 kronor (700 USD / 625 EUR). I remember talking to Jon before the album came out, and we agreed how amazing it would be if it ended up selling a thousand copies. Underground! We felt confident it would, sooner or later ...

They decided to start with five hundred CD copies, then monitor the sales and see how long it would take for them to sell. As it turned out, not very long; the lot was gone in less than a week.

– That’s when things really started to go wrong.

In December 1993, Tomas Nyqvist would make the biggest mistake of his life.

– One week after “The Somberlain” came out, he says with a slight edge to his tone, House of Kicks contacted me and said they needed at least one thousand more copies.

House of Kicks was a distribution company and record store where many Stockholm metalheads bought their music in those days.

– I asked them to pay me for the sales, as all of my money was invested in that record. ‘Tomas’, they said, ‘it’ll be three months before you get the settlement’. I thought they were joking, how the hell was I to print more? A while later they called me again.

‘Tomas’, they said, ‘we have a great business opportunity for you, can you come to our office?’

– I travelled to Stockholm and met with them over lunch. The owner said: How about this; you and the bands will each get five percent of the selling price and we’ll handle all printing and distribution?

That would leave both parties with approximately 12 kronor (1,4 USD / 1,25 EUR) per sold album to share.

– I thought it was a pretty good deal for everyone involved. ‘Let’s do it’, I said – and



Tomas Nyqvist (far right) with friends, 1991

so we went back to their office where I signed over my label to them.

Did you get a copy of the contract?

– Didn’t even think of asking for one. If I’d done that I might have had a fighting chance – they certainly knew what they were doing, I’ll give ‘em that.

Tomas offers a re-enactment of how he envisions their strategy meeting.

– ‘Here comes this nineteen-year-old kid from the countryside’ he says with a mock voice, ‘who has created something we want. Let’s tell him we’re signing a distribution deal, but instead we’ll just steal everything.’

He claims he never received any payments, and even worse – neither did the bands.

– They’d come to me and ask; ‘Where the fuck is our money?’ I referred them to House of Kicks, who played ignorant and sent them back to me. Repulsive swine of the worst kind.

On the subject of bands demanding their money – the same month as the DISSECTION album came out, No Fashion Records presented another milestone release; KATATONIA’s 1993 debut album “Dance of December Souls”. After losing his label, Tomas was convinced things couldn’t get any worse but a lawsuit for 120 000 kronor (14 000 USD / 12 530 EUR) moved him to reevaluate that position.

– KATATONIA were rightfully pissed, though it shouldn’t have been directed towards me. I didn’t even know what to say; ‘go ahead and sue – I don’t have any money’. Sure enough, it went to court with

lawyers and everything, and needless to say – I lost.

Tomas rang House of Kicks and pleaded with them for financial aid.

– ‘You’re making an absolute killing off DISSECTION, you’re pulling in lots of money – I don’t even have electricity in my apartment.’ Their response? ‘Not our problem.’ Life was not good then, let me tell you.

As I was writing up this interview, I thought it’d be interesting to get KATATONIA’s perspective.

– It was immediately clear to us that Tomas had been duped, says guitarist Anders Nyström, but unlike us he’d been given a say in the matter. No one consulted us so we had no insight into whatever deal they struck between them.

Shortly following the takeover, House of Kicks contacted the band to announce that KATATONIA were now under contract with them.

– Under new and entirely different clauses than we signed with Tomas, this really pissed us off. We only wanted out of this mess, to have our involvement nullified since we regarded it as breach of contract.

At the time, KATATONIA were members of the Swedish Musicians’ Union, and their lawyer advised them to sue No Fashion in order to get to the bottom of this.

– We did, but due to some outrageous judicial loophole House of Kicks wriggled out of it. The only one affected was Tomas, who had to declare personal bankruptcy – our aim was never to clamp down on him, we only wanted the rights to our album back.

Dealing with court proceedings as teenage metalheads sucked the enthusiasm right out of the whole thing for us.

Desperate to move on with the album they'd toiled with, they decided against further judicial process. They grudgingly accepted that the No Fashion releasing it was now under new management.

– We received a few modest payments in the beginning, in accordance to this deal that we'd neither approved nor signed. When we pointed this out we were told to 'take it or leave it'. The dialogue was contemptuous. They wanted us to sign a new contract and commit to an additional few albums with them, which we of course refused.

In 2004, "Dance of December Souls" was rereleased by Black Lodge – which is essentially No Fashion under a new guise. Ironically, the people behind House of Kicks were unable to keep using the brand following a complicated debacle with fellow Swedish record company MNW Music.

– With No Fashion stuck in a sewer between the toilets that were House of Kicks and MNW, they decided to run a little cash-grab scheme. This time the album was dealt ever greater disrespect than the first time, completely devoid of any reverence for our artistic work.

Black Lodge had taken some liberties with the aesthetic representation.

– They stuck some ghastly random artwork on the cover, then committed copy-right infringement by adding our new logo to it – one I had designed to signify a phase of KATATONIA that "Dance of December Souls" does not represent.

The result was that newer fans of the band mistook the reissued debut for a new album.

– They thought we should be grateful that the album was available again – while they raked in all the cash. No royalties, no communication or even respect for the wishes of the band.

I also decided to ask MARDUK guitarist and founder Morgan Håkansson about his memories of this whole ordeal.

– I remember it well, he says, Tomas lived for music and had the best of intentions.

Alas, he continues, age in combination with inexperience meant that he didn't fully understand how to run a company.

– He was more of an enthusiast than a businessman. I think he fell behind on the financial, and I imagine that's where House of Kicks saw their chance. Must have been quite the jackpot, getting their hands the No Fashion back catalogue. We never saw any money from them.

If I recall correctly, your debut also got the Black Lodge treatment?

– Yes, they reissued "Dark Endless" – against our express wishes I might add, with a layout they concocted themselves. After some squabbling we managed to get some meagre royalty payments for a short while, before they ceased again. That's when we decided to rerelease it ourselves, through our own label Blooddawn Productions.

House of Kicks in their current manifestation were also contacted and offered to comment, but have not responded.

The rumours going around about Tomas during these days mentioned nothing about him being left poverty-stricken in a dark and cold apartment.

– Word had it that I'd bought a castle somewhere – for fucks sake, I was completely destitute. It would have been around this time I realised that I wasn't much of a businessman. House of Kicks certainly were though, tricking a gullible teenager into signing over everything he had.

Today, Tomas muses, the back catalogue of No Fashion Records must have sold close to 300 000 records.

– The bands didn't see any money either, so they all hated my guts. What the hell was I supposed to do?

Seven years later when he'd moved to Gothenburg, he ran into former DISSECTION drummer Ole Öhman (DEATHSTARS, ex-OPHTHALMIA).

– He grabbed me and pushed me against the wall, demanded to know what the hell I'd been up to. I told him to go ahead and hit me if he really had to, but that he hadn't heard the whole story. He was furious as all hell but agreed to hear me out, so we sat down and I explained. Fortunately, he calmed down after that – at least regarding me.

– Had they only paid you and the bands as agreed, asks Dr. Schitz, it probably would have worked out pretty well?

– Yep, Tomas sighs, that's what's so shit about it – but they fucked me.

Tomas says that as far as he knows, only MERCILESS received some manner of acceptable compensation.

– DISSECTION too, in the end. After Jon was released from prison he paid them a visit in person, and asked for the rights back. **Asked?**

– In a manner of speaking. When he was out again I got a call out of the blue, we hadn't spoken in ten years by then. He asked if I still had the contract him and I signed, which I didn't; I'd thrown all that away ages ago. 'I'm taking back what belongs to me', he said, 'my albums have sold by the thousands yet I've never seen any money whatsoever.'

The first two DISSECTION albums are estimated to have sold more than 100 000 copies each. A while later, Nödtveidt told him he'd dropped by the House of Kicks office in person and retrieved what was justifiably his; the rights to "The Somberlain".

– I asked him how things were going with Nuclear Blast, who released the second album ("Storm of the Light's Bane") – he said he was going to fix that too. Sure enough, a few months later both of them were re-released on their own label Black Horizon.

With his dreams of running a record company soundly in ruins, Tomas realised he still had the magazine

– I decided to produce a few more issues. Rogga (Pettersson) from MERCILESS was asked to come on board, which he did.

Issue 8 came out in 1995 and sold fairly well. The duo made three more together before Pettersson had to jump ship.

– He was too busy with his band, which I fully understand. I made a few more copies on my own before it was finally put to rest. It's insane to see how hyped it's become these days; I've seen people selling early issues online for a lot of money. That's why I've decided to re-print all of the issues into one book.

Tomas says that the book of *Putrefaction Magazine* will be published in a limited edition, probably later in 2017.



PUTREFACTION MAGAZINE #5

THIS IS A TALE OF REMARKABLE FERVOUR AND DEDICATION. GROWING UP UNDER SOUTH AMERICAN MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, ADHERENCE TO THE EMERGING METAL SCENE MEANT ACCEPTING DEATH AS PART OF DAILY LIFE. FROM GUERRILLA WARFARE IN URBAN SETTINGS, TO REMOTE RAINFORESTS SEEKING SHAMANIC KNOWLEDGE; A PATH OF SCARS WHERE JOURNEY'S END MEANT LEAVING EVERYTHING BEHIND.

ALVARO



LILLO

Presenting Alvaro Lillo; a Chilean national who today resides in Germany, primarily known as live bassist for WATAIN, he also plays in UNDERCROFT and XALPEN. We begin this tale in the early eighties, when a neighbour unwittingly laid the groundwork for an obsession that would come to rule his life up until this day.

– He played rock bands in his house and I'd listen from my garden, stuff like DEEP PURPLE, PINK FLOYD; BLACK SABBATH and RAINBOW. Then I met some older guys who introduced me to IRON MAIDEN, VENOM, METALLICA and SLAYER. 'This is heavy', they said, 'it is the shit'. I was also shown the other side of rock – the fast thing with dark lyrics. That's where I've remained ever since, and I don't regret a single moment.

In these days, Chile was ruled by a military dictatorship with despot Augusto Pinochet at the helm. The educational system enforced school uniforms and mandatory short-cropped hair.

– Military scum as head teachers when they hadn't even finished school themselves. As a child, you had to follow the rules even if you hated them – it was normal in this war state. You knew that if you didn't obey, you'd get a bullet in your fucking head. And when you are kid, you don't want a bullet in your head.

Alvaro says that he believes his generation of satanic metalheads, the second one, to have been the wildest. His predecessors were three or four years older than him.

– When they saw me – an idiot child, they didn't say 'fuck off kid, you asshole' like today. Instead, they gave me tapes to listen to. I'd see someone on the street and say: Cool patch! Back then, not knowing was nothing to be ashamed of, so he'd explain what band it was. 'Go on and check it out'.

The emerging metal scene would congregate in the mountains, drinking around bonfires.

— The first time, I got drunk with only one beer but that was not the point. It was a lifestyle completely away from all else. The best thing was the philosophy in it, you know, it was much more than drunken

guys just listening to shit – they spoke about things; mysticism and metal.

Curious to know what his favourite bands were singing about, Alvaro taught himself English by translating their lyrics.

– Dictionary in my hands, I translated word by word without understanding the meaning of sentences, until the English started to work in my head by itself.

The most brutal music he was able to get his hands on was contemporary thrash metal, which featured a lot of 'socially conscious' themes. He really liked the music but once the lyrics had been deciphered he discovered that they didn't quite resonate with him.

– I was living in a country that was in a state of war, of course these kinds of lyrics were fitting... you felt it, straight away – yet I always knew this wasn't for me.

He finally struck gold when discovering some old heavy metal with Spanish lyrics.

– Bands speaking of blasphemy and fuck Christianity in my own language – ones that mixed this rage against society with the profane. Lyrics like; ‘We live at night, we die spilling our blood and fuck virgins and decapitate Jesus, we are the lost ones’ ... I was like, ‘Yes! This is who I am’.

Who were these bands?

– A few from South America, the rest were Spanish heavy metal bands. ÁNGELES DEL INFIERNO, BARÓN ROJO – this kind of thing, rock’n’roll with fucked up titles like ‘Shadows in the Darkness’, ‘Cursed is your Name’, ‘Beginning of the End’. Read the lyrics – poetry of fucking blasphemy. Much of it sounded silly in Spanish but some had that evil feeling – lyrics like these with dark and aggressive music, it was fantastic.

He stresses that these heretic allures far transcended simple adolescent fascination with socially tabooed topics.

– Living with that hunger and rage, we had no respect for political or religious authority. The blasphemy was real; they were fought every day on the streets and fields, in catacombs and tombs, from the rivers to deserts where great sorcerers still live. It was a time for honesty, at least for myself – if you claimed to worship death, you really did.

Alvaro notes that there were churches burning on southern soil long before they learned about what was going on in Scandinavia.

– I respected all of these acts. The Christian scum thought themselves untouchable in those days, but we brought them terror.

At the time, metal of any kind was a pretty fringe occurrence in Chile – the big thing was Latin rock.

- I hated it. Those who played this music looked like rockers and sometimes people could say things like 'You look like the guy from' ... I don't know, shit band called LOS PRISIONEROS. Then fight, straight away.

In their perpetual hunt for new music, the young metalheads would skulk around the one record shop that dealt with anything heavier than this Latin rock.

– I went there to just watch and listen the whole day. Albums playing all the time – we stayed outside the store and when we heard something interesting, we'd go in to ask what it was.

The prospects of buying a record on your own were laughable at best, so the friends would pool funds.

– ‘Okay – this weekend it’s yours, next weekend it’s mine’. Vinyl gets fucked up real easy so it was fight every Saturday; ‘Who scratched the shit!?’

The same was done with zines, which would usually pass through at least twenty sets of hands. These publications were the literature equivalent to South American bootlegs.

– Someone got hold of an American or European magazine, like *Metal Hammer* – from this they made their own fanzine, often hand-written. Translating the shit, usually the entire issue, they copied it in a machine and then sold it cheap.

With 'cheap', he means that it only took about four of them to share the cost.

– We'd sit reading it together the whole day and then imagine idiotic things, realising there was another world beyond the Andes Mountains.

Alvaro decided that he must visit these unexplored pastures one day, but knew he had to learn the ways of the world before

THE MURDER OF THE METALHEADS

attempting to tread them.

– The first metal concert I went to was a madhouse; everyone behaving like an aggressive animal in trance, jumping all over the place. Without proper amplifiers it sounded like shit but people were ecstatic. That's metal, a battlefield. You didn't go there to kill nobody but we felt like we were in a war, smashing everyone.

As riotous as the thrashing could get, it was the trip to and from the gigs that bore the real peril.

– You never know if you'd actually reach the venue, if you did you'd absolutely explode with happiness. Once the show was over you took a big, deep breath; 'Okay, now comes the way home', which was even more dangerous. Before each concert I'd say goodbye to my family, not knowing if I was coming back alive or not. The principle was to fight against this shit and set ourselves free.

One might assume that the threat came from some manner of street crime, but it was instead the Carabineros de Chile – the national law enforcement agency.

– It was the fucking police, at any time you could be shot in the street. We were into violent music and they called us enemies of society, the police had to fuck us up. So we fucked the police. Forget church and shit ... well, even if I was once able to watch the beautiful flames of a neighbouring church burning down. The police, they were the real bastards.

The local neighbourhood constabulary were the worst of the lot.

– They'd arrest us for no reason and we'd end up in the police station, standing like an asshole. One of my neighbours died in there, from a gas bomb thrown into his cell.

However, the young metalheads refused to break or back down.

– We fought them everywhere – threw Molotov cocktails, put needles and shit under their cars. Our neighbour's car was also fucked up but the target was the police. I once saw a cop burn to death inside a tank. Sometimes we would meet, smoke weed and make petrol bombs... then go on the back of the police station and throw them. It was total war.

Needless to say, this was a hobby not entirely without hazard.

– Had they caught us doing that they would've shot us right there – friends of mine died that way. I was once hit by a rubber bullet, hurt for a fucking month; big purple spot.

Alvaro describes his upbringing as fairly normal for the time being, coming from a working class family. The ones who had it really rough were the poor, who lived in ghettos. This squalor would become his haven, a refuge from harassment.

– There was 'freedom'; police didn't dare behave like assholes because of all the

seriously bad people.

Instead of harassing small pockets of metalheads, the police assigned to those areas would have their hands full with the general populace.

– Tanks, bombs, shootings, persecution and so on. Despite this, most of the time I felt safer there than in the middle of town. It was good for perspective to see the reality of Pinochet's rule; an entirely different picture from the lies and bullshit fed to the people by the TV. I saw the real damage that traitors brought to a country they'd sworn to serve.

The massive wealth gap between the country's social classes had polarised Chilean society, the metal scene being no exception.

– In the late eighties and early nineties there was a class war in metal. We were raised like a pack of wild street dogs; far from the nice houses, in the real terror that was my country at the time. These people from safe upbringings had no right calling themselves metalheads, they were terrified of the real ones – those who walked fearless in the dangerous parts of town.

The upper class metalheads would generally not have a good time mingling with the common man.

– We'd find them at parties and concerts, mummy boys we called them – confiscating their brand new t-shirt, tearing off patches. 'Ah, you listen music? We take your fucking Walkman. Go home pussy! This is metal; it's for people with balls – not you faggots.'

And so the bourgeois headbangers began cursing the proletariat.

– 'These low class motherfuckers, they steal from us.' Lots of fights, the scene became segregated; these guys played in their own places and the rest somewhere else. We'd meet outside the rock shop and then go to their concerts to fight and to kill – destroy the venue or whatever man, people died doing wild shit.

Alvaro recalls how a Colombian metal band was invited to play Chile in the mid-eighties.

– Of course they weren't paid and had to stay behind and work at a construction site to buy their tickets back home.

The first foreign 'evil metal band' to come to Chile were Brazilian legends VULCANO, in 1987.

– Some crazy fuckers started burning the wooden floor. It wasn't enough to hit each other and scream like beasts – they had to set a fire in the middle of the venue. The Brazilian motherfuckers got scared and asked if they should end their set; 'Stop and we kill you'. They kept playing.

1993 saw the first European appearance when German thrash metal act KREATOR came to Chile. At this point, football hooliganism had made its way into the scene.

– The whole audience was divided by two teams, singing football chants. I was pretty into that myself so I was happy to be there to fight; we lit up bengal torches inside the venue and started throwing shit.

This was before the headlining act had even taken the stage, and their entrance did little to calm the raging sea of violence.

– Imagine, listening to KREATOR play while fighting the enemy hooligans. Bullet belts flying everywhere, people jumping constantly – not a calm moment during that gig. One guy threw a stick on the *maricón* Petrozza: 'Ah', he screamed and picked it up, 'we will stop to play!'

Frontman Mille Petrozza's warning was largely unproductive, since barely a soul from the target audience spoke a word of English. Instead, many of them misinterpreted his agitated oration as approval.

– Everyone was like, 'YEAH!' ... and started throwing even more. He dropped the stick and left the stage.

Perhaps having been advised that a premature finale could potentially turn an unruly situation into complete disaster, he returned shortly thereafter.

– 'We will play the last songs but stop throwing things', he said in the microphone. 'YEAH!' They continued playing and we kept smashing each other.

This little skirmish would prove to be a mere precursor to the real battle, once the show was over the police had turned up in force.

– Cars, tanks, bombs – combat zone. There was a little ticket kiosk outside, it ended up in the middle of the street ten blocks away.

It wasn't only the highborn and the police that were the enemy.

– You couldn't mix styles because somebody would die. I've been to some concerts with a mix of punks and metalheads ... oh man – people stabbed, one guy lost an eye, cracked heads.

Were you never injured yourself?

– Not really. I mean, I was stabbed once and my ear broke when I was hit in the head, but many from my side got really fucked up. My friend Careloco almost died when running from the police, they fired a machinegun after him. He tripped and fell in the same moment bullets hit the wall, insane.

The Pinochet era was a time of perpetual turmoil.

– That's what I grew up with, as kids we watched all this shit. It was an everyday ritual, keeping blankets and sheets in the bathtub with water and salt. You had to be ready, when the police came, their teargas always followed so you covered the windows. It was normal.

At the height of civil strife, he was even unable to enjoy the safety of his own home.

– The façade of my apartment was full

of bullet holes. I lived on the fifth floor and I'd see the protests and riots below – then people running down the street when the police opened fire.

– Many times. I remember them, left lying around on the pavement as the police came. Then you had to move away from the window because they might shoot you through it.

– Sure, I was there but it wasn't political – only against the fucking police. To me, this was simple anarchy.

– At first; ‘Military shit is over, now it will be democracy’. I didn’t even know what that was, but if it meant no military it sounded fine to me. Nothing changed of course, not even to this day – it’s all a mask of neo-liberal piece of shit.

– It's all a dirty fucking lie. The most corrupt people today were the ones crying in Pinochet times; the communist party or whatever. Now, they are the greedy swine – unbelievable. I really want to go shoot them one by one.

– Corrupt politicians must be executed in a public place, in front of everyone. If you don't take these people and decapitate them before the whole population they will keep doing the same, this is how the human animal learns.

– The massive distance between social classes in Chile always freaked me out. I'm not from either low or high class but I have friends from both. Once you get to know all sides you understand that this great divide is a shit created by politics to make people fight each other for no reason. That's when I lost interest and stepped aside.

- I always got lost because I have crazy thoughts and didn't fit in anywhere. Then I understood that I need to think more cleverly; what is politics and where will it lead me? I realised it's all a big, dirty shit.

– As far back as I can remember, I've always felt connected to other planes in one way or another. First, you need to connect with the spirit and then develop it as you think is best.

– I felt an immediate attraction to the power in the energies shamans spoke of. I became obsessed with it, gathering wisdom about spiritual ideas until I came to understand the interrelations of different magical realms.

– It was very difficult to find teachers to guide my way. As time went by I lost interest in the mundane world and grew more serious about these things. Music was an important tool to bridge the arcane with real life and visions from psychedelic states would intensify my hunger for the dark secrets hidden beyond.

— *Brujeria* is common in remote areas of certain parts of South America, the countryside and in the mountains. It's extremely important to have proper guidance before going anywhere near this. I once visited the house of a real *brujo* and I can tell you, the amount of energy there was incredible.

– For example, I never questioned why daylight wouldn't penetrate the windows of a certain part of his house. Not the room we were in, but I could see it from where I was sitting. I have witnessed many strange things like this, situations that would break the mind of a normal person.

– It's a different connection. *Curanderos* (native plant healers), or *machis*, are highly respected within their communities, their work is with nature – travelling beyond and inside the human body, taking different shapes and forms. They believe it's their duty to grant fortune and goodwill to others, for this you must leave the filth of the modern world behind; become one with the soul of organic entities



Among the old-school Chilean metal scene we find the likes of ATOMIC AGGRESSOR, WARPETH, NECROSIS, PENTAGRAM, BLOODY CROSS and DEATH YELL. While he appreciated the music, Alvaro got the impression that most of them were devoid of spiritual authenticity.

– Even if the band name was cool, very diabolical, you'd meet them and see; 'No, I don't believe you are fucking devil worshipper, I think you are a fucking cock-sucker'.

I presume they were not part of the local heavy metal arsonist guerrilla?

- No, he scoffs, never. They were crying and refused to play in some places because of the bad people.

People like Alvaro, lest we forget.

- Exactly, he exclaims with his maniacal laughter, and every time I meet them I treated them like shit. When I got older and started playing in bands, I often had to share stage with them so I put most of that aside – with some exceptions.

His journey as a musician began as somewhat of an emergency solution.

– For my seventeenth birthday my grandmother wanted to give me a good present, so I told her I'd like to have a motorbike. My father found out; 'If you buy this motherfucker a motorcycle he will die on the first day and I will never forgive you'. She came to me and said 'Your dad won't allow me to do shit, but here – have the money. Buy whatever you want, but no bike'.

Alvaro invested most of the considerable pile of cash in treating himself to a relaxing weekend in the mountains, lubricated by bountiful quantities of intoxicants of varying legal stature.

– I came back to the city and thought: I need something to show my grandmother. One of our neighbours repaired TVs, radios and things like that, I went to him. He built his own amplifiers and

THE BRUJO PARADOX

guitars, so that's what I bought.

His first ensemble was a band founded with class-mates in school.

– We tried calling ourselves BASTARDS, terrible music. Thinking we played thrash or speed metal, in reality it was extremely bad punk with three chords in every song. One hour of bullshit rehearsal, more like improvised alcoholism – ‘Ah, we made a great song!’

In 1992 he moved to another city and ended up the bass player of death metal profanity EXECRATOR.

– We practised in the room of our friend's house. Our first drum kit had two carbon cylinders as kick drums with wooden twin pedals, the snare we'd bought in a flea market and lead bowls became our cymbals; imagine the sound. Many friends would come to enjoy our rehearsals, ending always with some kind of crime or abuse on the streets.

After five years, two demos and one EP, vocalist Jaime Parada left the band.

– Very crazy guy, good friend of mine. In the beginning, he really pushed me to stay focused and helped forming the role of music in my life.

Alvaro assumes a melodramatic pose as he haughtily narrates Parada's resignation speech:

– ‘My life is fucked up – work, money and all those things. I think I'm of no use to the band anymore. EXECRATOR is all I love in this world, it's like my baby. But I step aside knowing you will all do a very good job. Don't search for a singer, Alvaro – now you must sing the shit. I can't continue, always I will fuck it up.’

Alas, the recipients of the impassioned soliloquy were men of steel with iron hearts who remained unmoved by his plight.

– We didn't really listen to his honest friend-words, deciding he was a pussy we kicked and hit him – then told him to fuck off. I took the leading of the shit – we recorded two albums and played many shows.

Still holding on to his dreams of seeing what lay beyond the Andes, Alvaro started scheming plans of relocating to Europe.

– In my crazy head ... this was 1998, I said to the rest of EXECRATOR that we should go on tour in Europe and then stay there. Everyone went wild and agreed to the plan, but only a week later one of the guys said he couldn't do the tour, talking about his girlfriend and other idiotic things.

This upset Alvaro to the extent that he took drastic measures.

– For the first time in our life we plan something good and everyone wimps out. I grabbed my amplifier and bass, told them to fuck off and left – that's how you split up a band.

Disenchanted and seeking a change of scenery, he moved to the south of the country with his girlfriend at the time.

– It was good for a while but soon the urge to play returned. My girlfriend said that I would never find anyone to play with in that town, that I must move back to Santiago to do that.

He rang his brother requesting help and then found himself with a bittersweet offer, demanding tough choices.

– Look what I was on the way to do! Cut my hair and turn into a ...

He takes a moment to gather himself.

... person working at IBM. My stupidity had reached very high levels.

Alvaro swallowed his pride, accepted and agreed to meet his brother in Santiago.

– He promised to introduce me to his friend who was boss of the shit, saying they might hire me. Instantly, everything became grey.

Then why did you accept?

– It was fucking good money, why else? I can't work as a postman all my life.

I must confess to some difficulty envisioning señor Lillo carrying out his duties as an employee of the postal service.

– Shit money but no one cared about my hair, tattoos or black t-shirt. The best was that I didn't have a bicycle so I had to deliver walking; very shit but the only choice, except maybe in some factory.

He recalls applying for a job in a Chinese warehouse, only to find that now also his facial hair worked against him.

– ‘You must shave’, he decrees with an extravagant Asian accent, ‘only old people with knowledge have beard. You are young and idiot!’

Come the weekend of destiny, Alvaro still hadn't trimmed his mane.

– I thought to first meet with my brother and hoped to find some kind of soft way. I was on the way to Santiago when I called a friend – manager of UNDERCROFT at the time, and asked if I could stay at his place. I explained the situation to him over the phone. He was surprised, but this was pretty normal back then. Most metalheads changed and left everything behind – no more black shirts, no more hair; only work.

Our conversation gets side-tracked into a phenomenon the new millennium brought with it; a substantial number of long-time deserters attempting to slither back into the fold.

– Already having big kids, house, dog, car and fat wives they don't fuck anymore, they now come back to the metal scene.

Alvaro is completely unburdened by troublesome nostalgic qualms.

– Didn't you disappear twenty years ago? Doing the right capitalistic thing – the very one you were against, you fell straight into it. Here you are now, back as if nothing happened and calling yourself old-school? Shut your mouth and enjoy what you have instead. It is shit.

A few bands from that era have also taken up arms again, which agitates Alvaro to no end.

– Split up in the eighties because they were weak, now they are fat faggots who want to come out and play. ‘We are old-school metal’, fuck you man – fuck you. Like the reunion of PENTAGRAM, I really hate this. They buried the band because it was full of wimps and everyone in the scene hated them, then switched name and started playing pussy metal music. Now, twenty years later, they come raising the flag of ancient death metal? Fuck you, no way.

One reunion that's spared his fury is BLOODY CROSS, widely regarded as Chile's first black metal band and active from 1986 until 2001 when their original guitar player and vocalist Disciple of Nema perished in a car wreck.

– He died with his boots on and ten years later the band wants to reunite as a tribute to him, because he was a great guy. Back then no one cared about BLOODY CROSS; everyone said they were alcoholic motherfuckers who couldn't play. I thought they were real, hungry metal men.

We return to his apex crossroad – Alvaro arrived at his friend the manager's place and began drinking.

– I explained that I was sick of this. Every time I'd apply for a job, they would take one look at me; ‘Fuck off, cut your hair – you listen to the devil music? Are you communist?’ I had to go see my brother the next day, and try to fix this.

Though largely defeated, as they say – hope is the last thing that dies in man.

– Maybe there was a way, perhaps they weren't so strict. Or maybe I had to cut my hair and after a year they wouldn't care, so I could grow it again.

Though sympathetic to his cause, his friend urged him to try out for UNDERCROFT instead. As it happened, they had just fired both vocalist and bass player.

– It was only Pablo (Cortés, drums) and Claudio (Illanes, guitars) left, he said they'd been writing songs and wanted to record a new album soon. He called them and they were rehearsing that day, so we went there. They practised in a steel container.

Good acoustics?

– Guess. I listened to the songs they'd already written and loved them. We started jamming, continued drinking and decided to become a trio – three motherfuckers, we would record the album!

Needless to say, this called for a celebration in dignified metal fashion.

– I got so fucked up that I couldn't meet with my brother the next day. Instead I called him the day after, apologised and explained myself. He said, ‘your irresponsibility makes me doubt if I can help you get this job’, so I told him to fuck off and went

to rehearsal.

- I told her that everything was shit; I was so depressed at the thought of this job, with that kind of people. I also mentioned telling my brother to fuck off and that I was now the bass player and vocalist of UNDERCROFT.

- While we recorded "Danza Macabra" (2000), my friend the manager came with an idea for the next; he contacted Swedish producer Daniel Bergstrand (Dugout Productions studio) in Uppsala. 'You must go there and record in Europe, fuck this shit and make a good step. Finally you have a real band where nobody is a pussy motherfucker.'

– We played a long tour through Chile and Bolivia to save up money. When we got back we booked our tickets and I sold all belongings besides my bass guitar.

ADDENDUM - FEBRUARY 2017

- It felt as if they had nothing to do with spirituality and diabolism, or with the real terror being waged on the streets. I don't know... thinking like that feels weird now, because metal was in a different era back then - more primitive, for motherfuckers with balls and not any pussy. But then came the politic fans, Christians and other scumbags who mixed it up with their filthy ideologies.

- Privately, I don't give a fuck about belonging to either side of the circus - but the fact is that I hate human hypocrisy bullshit about goodwill or kindness in this political brainwash manipulation, all is a box of shit. Just hand them two coins and their ass is for sale. All pigs must bleed, and the first ones are those dirty servants of the demiurge. Murder of corrupt politicians should be a legal punishment shit!

- IRON MAIDEN were banned by politicians and the church in July 1992, their concert was shut down. At least it gave us opportunity to visit the evangelistic whores' demonstration and show them violence against their censorship, with some stops along the way to deliver cocktail surprises to the greens (slang for Chilean police).

– Not for political views or whatever, they didn't know a shit – it was the dictatorship and bastard church trying to put fear into people. nothing else. We were the rebels, not considered part of regular society under the eyes of mundane laws and parameter of social criticism.

– We were enemies of both the republic and the military bitches of a repressive system and like rabid dogs, war starts in a second.

– Ten years with the most awesome and fiery wolves of the north. It has been an extraordinary experience that made me dive into absolute madness and continue the path of dark gnosis. I've remained close on their every step of the way and I'm proud of having been part of this brotherhood through the danger, success and development in every challenge set before us.

– So if people say this or that, I really don't give a fuck – most of them just talk and do not know a shit about what we do or how little we care for their senseless words. All that matters are the results and significance of WATAIN's magical approach within the black arts, and the dedication which everyone credits as the success of our fearless steps. WATAIN is a dangerous manifestation with no compromises for mainstream or the weak clay-born world – we carry the storm and hunger of Satan. WATAIN was born in wild fire with lawlessness in the blood, we will continue forward among the horrors of a thousand nights and crimes of a thousand days ahead, feral and unafraid.

- This unexplainable feeling that makes things turn unique in the way of development, and also establishes strong relations between us. Everyone is of course a different individual but with many, many similar characteristics.

– Always pushing to the limit, walking for most of the time along the edge of dangerous challenges. I know the differences between Uppsala and Santiago at that time, and of course we are far apart in the way we were raised.

– On the other hand, I also see and understand how they grew up outside normal society. Even if there was no persecution or war inside the country, they developed under their own will. All of us, in one way or the other, continue being the same rebels, fearless warriors and focused visionaries who will never step back. There is no return.

RYAN FÖRSTER

– “Extermination Mass” is my vision of black metal, says Ryan Förster, the apex of all understanding gathered since first setting out on this path as a young man. DEATH WORSHIP is my latest manifestation in the league of bands affiliated with the eternal Ross Bay Cult.

More about the madness of the graves later. DEATH WORSHIP’s new EP, “Extermination Mass”, is the culmination of an arduous three year-long process.

– There were quite a few delays along the road from rehearsal to recording. First and foremost, I was swallowed by the trap set forth by Western civilisation – forced to prioritise food on the table and paying bills over private life. The ‘work life balance’ has become much more difficult to maintain during this generation, as we all know. It seems as if we’re increasingly forced to sacrifice our so-called ‘free time’ to maintain a comfortable lifestyle.

It could be argued that Förster’s most important contribution to extreme metal is the pioneering war metal monstrosity CONQUEROR. The band’s only other member was demon drummer James Read – now known from REVENGE, and seeing as he’s also part of this new project it begs the question why a new moniker was required in the first place.

– CONQUEROR was James and I putting our minds together, working out all concepts and music with each other. So despite the presence of both members, DEATH WORSHIP is not constructed in the same way; this is my vision. The message remains the same – nothing has changed in that regard, but I prefer restarting with a clean slate. I’m all about the present; not the past, and not the future.

How do you look back on CONQUEROR’s legacy today?

– It’s great to see bands we influenced make their own mark with new ideas and concepts – they got the point. It’s also infinitely annoying seeing those who just shit out amateurish and improvised recordings with blastbeat drums, noisy guitars, and gas-mask wearing goats on the cover. These people completely missed the point.

As we will soon learn, there was nothing half-arsed about CONQUEROR. There must be an iron will resting in the eye of the storm, a maelstrom anchored in intent.

– Pure devotion, never since have I been so utterly engrossed in a project. James and I started out it in 1996 after the demise of

A PERSONAL CONVERSATION WITH OUT-
SPOKEN UNDERGROUND STALWART RYAN
FÖRSTER. WE LEARN ABOUT THE
SECRETS OF ROSS BAY CEMETERY,
THE HISTORY OF WAR METAL PILGRIMS
CONQUEROR, AND HIS INITIATION
INTO THE PROUD CANADIAN
TRADITION OF BLACK
METAL SKIN-
HEADS.

both our bands, DOMINI INFERI and CREMATION. We were already close friends and decided to work together after discussing our visions of what a band should be.

Both men lived in a small city called Victoria, two hours from Vancouver. There was no metal scene, and overall few distractions.

– It was amazing being able to concentrate on the band at all times. We could be sitting in our flat late at night exchanging ideas, and then head straight to our rehearsal place at 2am to flesh them out. Or I would be at work and think of a lyrical concept, and when I got home we’d discuss it and build from there.

All this took place in seclusion from any scene, or other outside influences. Being the mid-nineties, it was also pre-internet age.

– Through isolation and tunnel-vision, by putting our minds together and writing music with every detail thought-through, we forged our own distinct sound.

Once the abstract concepts were in place, the duo started to breathe life into their creation by rehearsing as much as humanly possible.

– That’s how we came up with all of these ideas, like the crazy pick-slides and spiralling song arrangements. Our focus was on creating the most chaotic music possible while still, albeit barely, remaining within the established models of metal.

Later the same year, CONQUEROR released their first demo; “Anti-Christ Superiority”.

– The packaging was completed by a nice photocopied layout, as it was done back then. I remember going to a CANNIBAL CORPSE show in Vancouver shortly after the demo came out, armed with about ten copies and hoping to see the BLASPHEMY guys there.

The Canadian black metal skinhead legends have been Ryan’s primary musical influence ever since he heard their 1990 debut, “Fallen Angel of Doom...”.

– CONQUEROR was essentially a continuation of some of the concepts they pioneered with that LP, and I was determined to let them hear the fruits of their legacy. Anyway – I got to the show, walked into the venue and could not believe my eyes. Not only were BLASPHEMY there, they had their own section of the club with a clear view of the stage.

No one appeared to dare go near their table. Ryan however, was on a mission.

– I approached them and handed out copies of the demo, they seemed pretty uninterested overall but flung the tapes into their jackets, so I hoped they’d check it out. Fast forward to about ten days later; James and I check our PO Box and ... holy shit – there was a letter from fucking Black Winds!

Nocturnal Grave Desecrator and Black Winds is the hulking orator of BLASPHEMY, he also performs guest vocals and effects for DEATH WORSHIP. In his letter, he praised the demo and expressed excitement over having such a band in the Vancouver area.

– The local scene was pretty much dead at the time and BLASPHEMY were inactive. His phone number was included in the letter, so I called to thank him for his words; we got to talking and then stayed in touch. I went over to Vancouver with James a few times after that, visited the guys and we became friends.

Upon its conception, CONQUEROR was initially intended to assemble a full line-up capable of performing live shows.

– However, James and I soon discovered there were no suitable members in our area. We never really had any offers of bringing our music to the stage, as the band was defunct before the full-length record was even released.

The tale of debut album “War.Cult. Supremacy” is a tragedy of Shakespearean magnitude. Having been recorded in December 1996, it was scheduled for release two months later.

– We signed to Evil Omen Records, a division of Osmose Productions in France. They transferred the studio money, we recorded the album and then sent them the master tape and layout – all that remained was printing and putting it out. Unfortunately, Evil Omen went bankrupt before this happened.

To the duo’s horror, the label shut down and “War.Cult.Supremacy” was shelved. There was nothing they could do about it since the now-defunct label owned the rights

WIERZBYLURE REAGONYPIKREKLEDSXEPBEPWIMYREKWHCONQUEROR

to the album.

– CONQUEROR was left in total limbo; all of our next plans was based on the release of that album so when it didn't happen, we were forced to go in other directions. We didn't have the money to buy back the recording and release it ourselves, so in 1998 we recorded the "Annihilate" demo. It was just a selection of tracks from the unreleased album, meant to keep the band name alive.

Were you actively writing new material during this time?

– We had four songs completed at the time James and I went our separate ways. One of them was used on a REVENGE seven-inch in 2002; "Superion Revenge", but that version is a little different from the original. The remaining material has never been used for anything else. "Extermination Mass" was written after I knew that James



STARSPAWN

would be on drums, I used no CONQUEROR songs or riffs.

In 1999, more than two years after "War.Cult.Supremacy" was originally scheduled for release, the now defunct US label Full Moon Productions expressed interest.

– BLACK WITCHERY were signed to FMP, and Impurath (bass, vocals) had told the manager about our shelved album, how it was vicious and extreme – all recorded and ready for release.

The label's proprietor liked what he heard and proceeded to obtain the rights from Evil Omen Records.

– It was great that the album was finally being released, but this Full Moon character was a total goof about the whole thing. First, he released the CD version on his label – but was too lazy to even change the layout so the Evil Omen logo is still on it. Then he li-

censed the recording for vinyl release to two different labels in Europe at the same time.

He what?

– Yes! Both of them were completely unaware of each other's involvement, so suddenly there were two different versions of the same record released around the same time. The Merciless Records LP did alright and sold out quickly, thanks to of the owner's vast network.

The other label, Spain's Death to Mankind, was not so fortunate. Sales didn't quite go as planned, as having to go up against an established and well-connected competitor was not part of his budget calculation.

– To top it all off, FMP refused to give us any copies of the album; he told us that he had procured the rights and owed the band nothing. That was a new low for an underground label. Anyway, after some threats we ended up getting something like fifty copies of the CD.

Today, American label Nuclear War Now! Productions owns the rights to the recording, and allows them full control of the layout and anything else related to the band.

Before the FMP debut debacle began, CONQUEROR had ceased operations.

– We decided that we had enough of boring old Victoria and it was time to get out. James ended up in Edmonton and I went to Vancouver. There was no bad blood or anything – we just decided it was time to leave for a new city, but couldn't agree on which one.

Unsurprisingly, neither Förster nor Read are particularly promising types so the only available option was to disband. Shortly after moving to Vancouver, Ryan fell into bad company – not only socialising with the BLASPHEMY boys but also being drafted for rhythm guitar.

– I've been through a lot with those guys, always violence and chaos and other craziness... But unless I'm asked about a specific situation I wouldn't know where to begin.

We'll save the anecdotes for another day, and focus on Ryan's own exploits. In 2009 and in their first concert appearance in eight years, BLASPHEMY headlined Canadian festival Messe des Morts. The name might sound familiar, seeing how the 2016 edition was forced to cancel as a result of booking Poland's GRAVELAND.

– The promoter of the festival is a huge black metal fanatic and like most people interested in the genre, he came across GRAVELAND and liked their music. What I'm trying to say is, this guy is a metal-head above all else.

The only agenda this gentleman has, says Ryan, is one of enthusiasm for the music.

– Not politics of any kind. So when these foolish hippy bums come along and get his festival shut down, thinking they brought triumph to their cause ... in reality, they are undermining the very foundations our civilisation is built on. People died for liberties now taken for granted, such as the free speech which enables even the most useless elements of society to come along and shit on said rights.

How did the Canadian metal media handle this?

– I don't really follow it as they rarely cover bands I'm into, and if they do it's usually full of disinformation. Regardless, I can't imagine there was much reporting going on; I guess it's easier to ignore the heavy issues and stick with the fun topics usually found within these outlets.

After the interview, Ryan messages me to say that he checked a few Canadian metal sites and could find no mention of this story. He is generally not overjoyed by recent scene developments, where extreme metal is getting increasingly polarised by political interests.

– It's completely beyond me why these wimps and infiltrators who need safe lyrics and imagery in music even listen to black metal. It was never for them, yet here they are.

Like many others, he expresses a sense of nostalgia for the under-

BLASPHEMY

ground of the early nineties. As an example, he mentions his experience with Øystein 'Euronymous' Aarseth, the late guitar player of Norwegian black metal band MAYHEM.

– I contacted Euronymous on the strength of the two tracks on the "Projections of a Stained Mind" compilation. I picked up the CD version and discovered killer bands such as GROTESQUE and MACRODEX, both of which I was previously unfamiliar with.

The MAYHEM tracks "Freezing Moon" and "Carnage" stood out, so Ryan sent a letter to the address provided on the compilation CD and got a quick response. Euronymous told him they were planning on recording an album soon but that vocalist Dead had committed suicide, so there was going to be

lished idea of what Satan and evil was. Doing things like photographing his friend with his head blown apart, and trying to get others to follow his path burning churches, etcetera – it all must have made sense in his head.

The venerated term 'black metal skin-heads' was coined by BLASPHEMY, specifically by the previously mentioned Nocturnal Grave Desecrator and Black Winds.

– It encompasses everything that's so great about BLASPHEMY, realising even back in the late eighties that this music is not for everyone. They played exclusively for themselves and others like them – I mean, who would dare to wear a hoodie with 'BLACK METAL SKINHEADS' printed huge across the back? This was extreme back then, and still

Bay burial ground.

Anyone familiar with BLASPHEMY is likely to recognise the name of this notorious graveyard.

– When I first discovered them, I noticed in the lyrics to the song "Ritual" that they were going off about this Ross Bay. I found out that it was a cemetery in the city of Victoria, where there had been plenty of reports of satanic activity through the years.

Much of this came from a book published in 1980, *Michelle Remembers*. It was co-written by a Canadian psychiatrist and his former patient, then wife, and is about a girl who was allegedly abused during diabolical rites in Ross Bay Cemetery. While most claims appear to have been thoroughly debunked in this day and age, it had a massive impact at the time; becoming both a best-seller and a cornerstone in the eighties hysteria of satanic ritual sacrifices lurking in the repressed memories of children.

– Needless to say, this was of the greatest interest to me. I lived in Edmonton at the time, and my imagination was running wild about this alleged gateway to Hell.

A few years later, Ryan had the opportunity to move to Victoria and so hopped on a plane without even having set foot in his new hometown. Instead of the uninspected apartment, his friends who collected him at the airport drove straight to the cemetery.

– So even before I got to see my new place and familiarise myself with the surroundings, we were already checking out Ross Bay. I remember walking onto the grounds that cold evening, but feeling warm winds as we crossed over the cemetery threshold.

Not usually one to believe stories of the supernatural, this experience was eerie to the point where it raised some questions. The infamous resting place has been part of Ryan's artistic expressions ever since.

– We took that photo of the angel wearing my gas-mask, for the "War.Cult.Supremacy" cover artwork. Also, on stage with BLASPHEMY I wear an inverted cross that was buried in Ross Bay Cemetery for a week.

Besides a portal to netherworlds infernal, the name also adorns a music label.

– Some time after my relocation to Vancouver, I came into contact with a Spanish band called PROCLAMATION. I really enjoyed their demo tape so I asked them which label they were signing to. Much to my surprise, they had received no offers – so I decided it was time to remedy this situation by starting up my own operation.

And so, with help from Nuclear War Now!, the Ross Bay Cult was born.

– At the time I had a stable living situation and a full-time job, so I was able to put some time and resources into building up the label. Besides the PROCLAMATION albums I released, there was the ANTICHRIST



STARSPAWN

Nocturnal Grave Desecrator and Black Winds, Ryan Förster

a delay.

– He introduced me to his label, Death-like Silence Productions, and pointed me to bands I might be interested in since I liked MAYHEM.

Do you remember which ones?

– ABRUPTUM, specifically. I bought their "The Satanist Tunes" demo and was mystified! That was the first time since getting into SODOM years earlier that I heard a band which actually sent shivers down my spine. Euronymous was very helpful and really cool to me – he even sent CD's and shirts before I paid for them, and told me to reimburse him whenever I could. No one else would do something like that.

In recent times, with Hollywood films and whatnot looming over us, there has been a fair bit of discussion about Euronymous' legacy.

– From what I know, he had an estab-

lished idea of what Satan and evil was. Doing things like photographing his friend with his head blown apart, and trying to get others to follow his path burning churches, etcetera – it all must have made sense in his head.

Ryan adds that this was a convenient means of thinning the herd; printing merchandise that only fans with requisite testicular fortitude were able to bear.

– We adhered to this concept almost religiously in our circle – proudly showing up in public with our heads shaved and slogan displayed.

When Ryan first approached the band members back in 1996, he had long hair – but after meeting them and subsequently getting to know Black Winds, he decided to do his part in keeping alive a proud Canadian tradition.

– I brought clippers and a portable stereo to Ross Bay Cemetery, then blasted "Fallen Angel of Doom..." while I proceeded to remove years of hair. I then left it there, so my offering will forever be part of the Ross

WARRIORS OF THE CROSS CONQUEROR

(Vancouver version) LP, as well as WRATH-PRAYER from Chile. I also distribute official BLASPHEMY merchandise, keeping that cult in everyone's face.

In 2015, he was also able to co-release his favourite album of all time – the one which set him on this journey some twenty-five years ago; “Fallen Angel of Doom...”

– A big triumph! Things have been a bit unstable lately, so my Ross Bay Cult label has been on the back-burner – but now I think I'll be able to get things back on track and start it up again.

The repeatedly referenced Nuclear War Now! is also to thank for CONQUEROR's exclusive reunion concert in 2014.

– Yosuke (label manager) has his notorious festival by the same name out in Berlin, Germany. One year, he asked about CONQUEROR – this time the situation was perfect, as the other members of REVENGE were available to complete the band.

Their performance was later released as the 2016 DVD “War.Cult.Supremacy Live”.

– Man, that night was surreal! I could feel the electricity in the air before I walked on stage. Everything just came together perfectly and we had a flawless performance. It was incredible, the absolute pinnacle of my musical career.

This makes me curious if we'll ever see Read and Förster on stage together again.

– I'm only now starting to explore the idea. Ultimately, I'd kill to have DEATH WORSHIP as a live entity – crushing and desecrating everyone, but the conditions have to be just right or it won't be worth it.

You're making your vocalist debut after twenty-five years in the business, are the BEHERIT sounding ones yours?

– My vocals are exclusively inspired by BLASPHEMY's demo version of “War Command”, from their 1989 “Blood Upon the Altar” demo. Black Winds performs them on that one song only, and then never again. We used something similar in DOMINI INFERI, sang by drummer Sven Cannon. But yes, people are telling me that they are reminiscent of BEHERIT.

I first met Ryan in December 2001, when he was touring as live guitarist for Canadian black metal two-piece GODLESS NORTH. The North American Black Metal Invasion also featured INQUISITION, KRIEG and SECRETS OF THE MOON and was organised by Akhenaton of JUDAS ISCARIOT.

– I was friends with both members due to many similar interests, and was asked to join the band for this tour. In other words, I was the most suitable person for the position at the time and I in turn supported their visions and ideologies.

Was this your first trip to Europe?

– No, I had travelled there to meet some of my contacts a few years prior, but never experienced what a live show was like. This

was my first real exposure to the European black metal scene.

It was a lot different than it was in Canada, as black metal caught on and grew in Europe long before North America.

– Seeing how strong the scene had grown in Europe was great. Watching the guys that Akhenaton had helping him behind the scenes was also amazing, dedicated people going above and beyond just to make sure that everything ran as smoothly as possible.

A memorable tour stop was at the old Festung venue in Bitterfeld, Germany – with one highlight of the evening featuring a spontaneous slapstick performance by NARGAROTH. The main attraction, however, was the venue itself. Coming from Sweden, it was a bit of a treat; the most fitting black



metal locale one could possibly imagine, somewhere between post-apocalyptic warehouse and heavy metal concentration camp.

– That venue was the coolest one on the entire tour, the atmosphere there was perfect for a black metal live ritual.

Since his first appearance in the metal scene, Ryan has made himself known for touting a form of philosophical elitism.

– I look upon this world through a lens of pure hatred and disgust, humankind fills me with contempt – we had so much potential but instead all is wasted on the falsehoods of religion, politics, and other trivial exploitations.

He discovered Ragnar Redbeard's *Might is Right* back in the early nineties. First published in 1890, the pseudonymous author advocates a form of Social Darwinism – a line of thinking where the human animal is locked in an existential cycle of perpetual struggle, in which the survival of the fittest rules.

– I was able to obtain a photocopied, DIY-version via the mail from a small esoteric group based in New Zealand. Reading this book along with the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche gave me perspective on thoughts I already had. Many of the ideas discussed in *Might is Right* are outdated, and it explores subjects I have no interest in. I've only taken to heart the portions that spoke to me – it was an influence, not a roadmap.

Now, several decades later – I'm curious how beneficial this world-view has been to his person.

– I can't say that my adult life has been affected positively by my personal philosophies. In fact, my negativity has become somewhat of a detriment in some aspects. But overall, my path is still superior to the ones tread upon by misguided drones – trapped within the laws and doctrines of their enslavers.

Do you ever think about what might have happened if Evil Omen hadn't capsized?

– The last half of the nineties saw the metal scene in a rather tragic state. Death metal was tired and uninspired, and black metal mostly a joke of happy-sounding keyboards and circus-clown-looking idiots in goth-inspired corpse paint. Bands that started out great in the early nineties began to suck. You really had to dig deep to find new records worth listening to – I relied on my personal network, and was constantly searching distro lists for something even remotely interesting.

Had the CONQUEROR debut been released in 1997 as intended, he believes the audience would have been smaller but far more dedicated.

– It would have reached those who were into this chaotic, bestial metal – but probably been largely ignored by the black and death metal scenes of the time. We would have gotten the zero-out-of-ten treatment in all the big magazines, just like SODOM in the early days. That would have put us in good company!

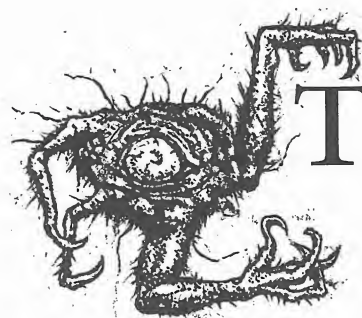
Right – so what's Ryan Förster's next move, creatively?

– When I listen to “Extermination Mass”, I can hear in my mind the many ways to explore and expand; I want to tackle the colossal task of creating a full-length LP. This will take massive amounts of energy, commitment, and focus.

As mentioned earlier – performing this style correctly requires fierce devotion.

– For me, an album should be a monument. We will also explore live show possibilities – but if that seems unrealistic then everything will be focused on recording. I have only just pried open the gates, now the beast is unleashed and free to destroy in ways that none can control. We will keep the Ross Bay Cult eternal!

SPANISH DEATH/BLACK METAL MONSTROSITY TEITANBLOOD PREFER TO OPERATE IN OBSCURITY. IN A RARE CESSATION OF SILENCE, FRONTMAN NSK EXPLAINS HOW THEY FOUND INSPIRATION IN PISS-SOAKED SCRIPTURE, IN CLERICAL MADNESS, AND FROM THE FINAL BLACK VOID.



TEITANBLOOD

SPANISH DEATH/BLACK METAL MONSTROSITY TEITANBLOOD PREFER TO OPERATE IN OBSCURITY. IN A RARE CESSATION OF SILENCE, FRONTMAN NSK EXPLAINS HOW THEY FOUND INSPIRATION IN PISS-SOAKED SCRIPTURE, IN CLERICAL MADNESS, AND FROM THE FINAL BLACK VOID.



TEITANBLOOD's new EP, "Accursed Skin", was released December 13, 2016. As is their tradition, and in stark contrast to marketing guidelines, they presented their latest output only once it was available.

– Indeed, says guitar player and vocalist NSK, we're quite austere when it comes to statements. I don't know what else would even make sense to announce, besides new merch or an upcoming tour.

The EP gives a vinyl home to "Sanctified Dysecdysis", a song previously only available on the 2012 "Woven Black Arteries" mini-CD. As for the new track, "Accursed Skin", it is a nasty piece of work. Having now listened to them consecutively, there's little doubt that this most recent filth was dug up from the same mound.

– Despite all the years between them, the same concepts integrate both compositions; the continuance of the vision we had when forming the band.

Starting out in 2003, TEITANBLOOD set out to draw death metal from black metal sources and vice versa.

– Our urge to create was fed by the minimalistic and obscure atmosphere of recordings such as "Satanic Blood" (VON), "Angelcunt" (ARCHGOAT), "Drawing Down the Moon" (BEHERIT) and "Joined in Darkness" (DEMONCY). On this foundation, additional albums were incorporated until everything had slithered together into the organism it is today.

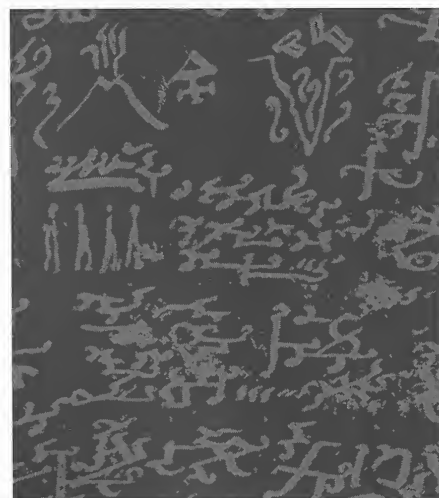
Since their debut album, "Seven Chalice" from 2009, TEITANBLOOD's music has been distributed by Norma Evangelium Diaboli. The French label is known for operating under a rather strict framework for the kind of artists they choose to work with, so I'm curious how this collaboration came to be.

– Contact was mediated by *Dauthus Zine* – we then met with NoEvDia to see how aligned we were in terms of standards, and took it from there. We are honoured and

grateful to be part of this alliance, with them and The Ajna Offensive as benefactors.

The editor of *Dauthus*, Swedish-Finnish artist Timo Ketola, is closely linked to TEITANBLOOD. NSK reveals that the main inspiration for "Seven Chalice" came not only from musical lodestars, but the publication's third issue.

– Many records give an adequate representation of what death metal is all about. I am however certain that anyone in pos-



session of this grimoire will concur that no other work has ever caught the essence of the genre quite like *Dauthus* #3.

The journal is likely to leave a lasting impression without actually being read, seeing as a layer of blood and urine coats each of the approximately two hundred copies. With clever commentary and exceptional interviews framed in perfect aesthetics, it's in itself a piece of underground history on par with the iconic *Slayer Mag* #10.

– I can't find the words to describe it, because it's such a massive work that even today is difficult to process. "Seven Chalice"

was conceived out of our interpretation of how *Dauthus* would sound on record.

How did you go about this?

– Preparing the album was quite challenging, with the new material being a lot more complex than any of our previous songs. After a long process full of ugly memories, we were finally done with the recording in November 2007.

Declining to elaborate on disagreeable recording reminiscence, NSK mentions that the artwork then took nearly an additional year to complete – during which they mixed and mastered the album at Moontower Studios.

Responsible for this artwork was the previously mentioned *Dauthus* editor. It would not be beyond the realm of the reasonable to say that Ketola's aesthetic contributions have played a significant part in the shaping of TEITANBLOOD.

– That would actually be an understatement, Timo has been as vital as if he was involved musically. During our numerous discussions – be it of paintings, movies or books; he'll often have observations or ideas that might not even relate to music but ends up incorporated as part of a song or lyric.

NSK first met Ketola when travelling to Italy to see MORTUARY DRAPE and WATAIN in February 2004.

– This was one of my all-time favourite trips, and WATAIN's performance was one of the fiercest I ever saw.

Back then, he was one of few Spaniards that would frequent the usual underground festivals and concerts for European heavy metal derelicts.

– It's not as if I was a pioneer or anything. I'm aware of a lot of people from Barcelona and Madrid who in the nineties used to travel to London and Paris to see bands that weren't stopping by Spain.

This is precisely what NSK was up to. He adds that these days, the amount of people travelling abroad has increased exponentially.

HYPERBOLIC PURGING TONGUES

– Fifteen years ago when I started – things like low-cost airlines, Airbnb or Google Maps weren't that popular.

Any other memorable spectacles?

– Open Hell Festival in Czech Republic, definitely. I don't even recall what the exact year was but it seems like a long time ago now. I remember trying to find my way to Volyně, and every single fucking road-sign looked like a MASTER'S HAMMER title. Then the terrain, trains and stations... they took you twenty years back in time.

Drawing inspiration not only from underground publications, TEITANBLOOD's one-song EP "Purging Tongues" from 2011 is conceptually based on *In the Name of the Rose* by Italian author Umberto Eco.

– To this day I am obsessed with this book. Not only for its enjoyable crime investigation plot and extraordinary religious corruption but also all the wonderful deliberations it revels in.

These range from clerical divisions over contradictory interpretation of scripture, to the carnal excesses that poison the soul – and of course, the Spanish Inquisition.

– The obsession with the day of wrath, conflicts of science versus faith, censorship of knowledge to protect holy truths... the list of intriguing subjects is endless.

The core of "Purging Tongues" is a passage from the book where the monastery's blind and ancient librarian describes the coming of the Antichrist.

– To use it was already planned, as can be seen in the "Seven Chalices" sleeve, but we soon realised that this project required a dedicated release.

For the narration, studio producer and long-time friend Javi Bastard managed to arrange a favourable deal with a professional actor. NSK adds that this is another gentleman who has been invaluable to TEITANBLOOD.

– Javi is an important pillar and has helped immensely in shaping our sound. Another essential contributor is C. G. Santos (LIKE DRONE RAZORS THROUGH FLESH SPHERE), who brings into reality all of our ideas for the atmospheric parts.

The narrator that Bastard enlisted is actually a well-known Spanish actor, who shall remain nameless.

– He performed above and beyond our expectations. That, coupled with the visions from the text etched on the B-side of the vinyl, makes this EP my personal favourite from our body of work.

When the EP was released in December 2011, more than two and a half years had passed since the debut.

– After "Seven Chalices", I took over the guitars full-time so it was like starting from scratch again. Our focus had narrowed – that EP was almost like a demo as we were trying to adapt to the new situation.

The following year saw "Purging Tongues" available on compact disc, in the form of mini-CD "Woven Black Arteries". It also featured the song that is only now getting a vinyl release.

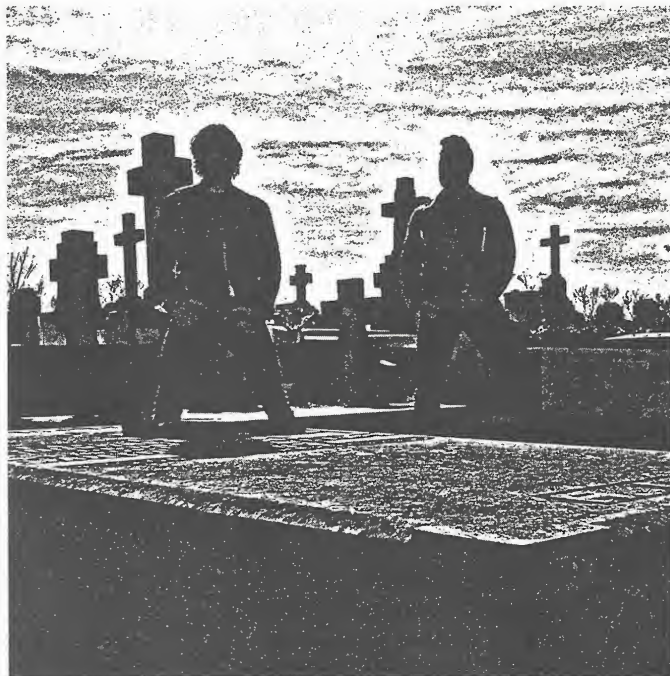
– Our intention was to prepare a new album, but we got so engrossed in the creation of "Sanctified Dysecdysis" that we decided it also needed its own space. As for our second album – "Death" (2014); we've deliberately kept silent about this work to let its immensity speak for itself, and that's how it will remain.

This reverence for the Reaper, 'death worship' and what not; are you hoping for a favourable reception once you finally meet?

– Nah, special treatment would be a disappointment. Nothing deserves awe quite as much as this endless source of inspiration. In our case, it's a simple ceremonial gesture to the most genuine, entirely certain and omnipotent of presences.

Besides a stint with Spanish war metal mongers PROCLAMATION, NSK also lent his voice to the then newly-resurrected Swedish black/death metal band OFERMOD.

– Belfagor and I got in touch around 2005, I was originally only



supposed to do live vocals. That summer I went to Stockholm and we rehearsed both the "Mystérion Tés Anomias" EP as well as the new songs that came out that year.

Six months later, NSK was invited to participate on what was supposed to be OFERMOD's debut album; "Pentagrammaton".

– I recorded my vocals in a day and a half with basically no possibilities of rehearsing beforehand. Back in those days it was uncertainty and chaos to the maximum, and the recording deadline became extremely tight.

The band split up again shortly afterwards and despite having resumed operations, the recording remains unreleased.

– Songs and riffs were used in "Tiamtu" (OFERMOD) and a NEFANDUS album, but none of them ended up as strong as "Pentagrammaton".

I'm going to take a stab in the dark here and guess that TEITANBLOOD is not a particularly lucrative venture compared to how much time, effort and money has gone into it. As such, I'm curious where the motivation to keep going comes from.

– The main drive is that we're still inspired to keep doing what we do. We feel more like visionaries than artists – becoming an artist, or a musician in this case, is a consequence of committing to mould that particular vision. It's not something you do on purpose, just like you become part of the scene regardless of if you want to or not.

Stardom obviously holds little appeal, given the duo's renowned aversion to the spotlight.

– See, we're obsessed with the small details. Working very closely with those who contribute, we can't really afford time-consuming pursuits such as chasing fame and fortune. We're fine with those who do, but it's not our business.

TEITANBLOOD is not a live act. NSK isn't overly impressed with claims stating that 'real' bands must prove themselves in concert, to validate their artistic output.

– Well fellas, go and tell that to Quorthon (BATHORY). What's wrong with a studio recording anyway? Some releases seem to have been conceived for this very purpose, take "De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas" (MAYHEM) or "A Blaze in the Northern Sky" (DARK-THRONE) for example; albums I'd never want to experience live.

He adds that it's simply not worth the efforts and resources it

SHRIMP? KISS? SHOCK? LET IT TONGUE WALK? ALL ABOUT THE REPTILE

would take to convey all layers present in their recordings, and an inferior arrangement would deal the source material great disrespect.

– This would also mean time lost from composing. Keep in mind that both of us have tight schedules and we rarely rehearse, so it's better to channel time and energy into something productive.

In a recent ANGELCORPSE interview, Pete Helmkamp pointed out that while music has been with man throughout history, it's only in recent times that we've been able to reproduce it through recording. The live performance, he claims, is the essence of music.

– I would agree with that if we refer to an ensemble like DEVIL DOLL, whose complexity embodied in a live experience could surely be deemed ritualistic. I find this statement double-edged though – just like the proper combination of variables can enhance the aural experience, it can also ruin it.

All things have a resonant frequency, with the classic illustration of this being that of an opera singer breaking a crystal glass. Every object is made of atoms, and the way they fit together has a unique resonance. Hitting the right note at a high-enough volume will burst the crystal, its frequency beating so violently that it can no longer contain the energy. These resonances can be found everywhere in nature, including the human body.

Do you think that's why music and sound alone can alter our moods and feelings?

– Absolutely, I imagine all sorts of musical vibrations or noises have a direct correlation with our general perception and emotional state. The relaxation brought on by the right mantra, or the stress of an Iraqi prisoner being tortured with SLAYER, are good examples. After all, aren't all of our thoughts electrical impulses?

That depends on how one interprets the nature of consciousness. While thoughts might be delivered to the brain by electrical impulses, their source isn't necessarily something that can be detected by EEG equipment.

– Certainly. I don't deny that there are currents beyond what can be scientifically measured, just like I don't ignore kinetic elements or the power of visualisation.

Those who entertain the notions of a soul, existential cycles, or a spirit world would be unlikely to agree with the assessment of the cerebral being limited to neuron activity.

– While history plays out in somewhat ironic cycles and spirituality may be a motivational force strong enough to become a lifestyle, I'm very down to earth myself. Once your organs cease activity, I believe you become carrion for worm.

What about a 'sixth sense' then –

something related to the Ajna chakra?

– I associate that with the reptilian brain and one's primal instincts, which to me can tell you far more about yourself than whatever practices people are now peddling to show off their communion with higher spirits.

Yet those who have never opened their third eye wouldn't even know it's there. For instance, referencing a commonly accepted sense – a fragrance malfunction in one's nasal cavity does not invalidate observations of flatulence.



– I agree, but I have never developed a regular enough yogic practice to give you a more elaborate opinion. I'm far more familiar with the Qigong concepts of the dantians, or energy centres, which can grant you amazing body-awareness.

As can be gleaned from our conversation – or rather my vexatious inquiries, NSK is not a huge fan of mindful metal.

– In most cases and based on what I've experienced, those who spew the most incoherent arguments dressed up as 'illumination' are really not seeking gnosis so much as comfort in their own pseudo-intellectual shit.

Considering how many alleged devotees of pitiless violence and global murder we see in the scene, there's really not all that

many one could envision inflicting much more harm than the occasional drunken scuffle with other metalheads.

– The vast majority live in an illusion, believing the stories they tell themselves – in this case when it comes to handling violence.

One could speculate how many of them would have the psyche to carry out everyday duties required from the average employee of an entrepreneurial South American contraband operation.

– I suppose that Hollywood and the internet are the main reasons people like to fantasise about mayhem and crime, but experience is no substitute for anything.

There seems to be an unspoken general consensus that the overwhelming majority of black metal musicians are pretenders; in the sense that most don't really embody the satanic, occult, chaos-gnostic or whatever image their bands espouse.

– To be honest, I have yet to see any form of subcultural collective that is a hundred percent genuine.

While authenticity is supposedly a vital factor, it's debatable if the scene would actually benefit from a cessation of pretence and having everyone declare their true spiritual beliefs – or lack thereof.

– That would make things too easy. There's a certain reward in the struggle of filtering out what's fake or irrelevant, it's necessary in order to understand the real value of integrity.

While the new wave of black metal likely to appear in such a speculative scenario would be an interesting experiment, it's questionable if it would hold much lasting appeal. Theological concepts pertaining to 'as long as I get drunk on the weekend, all is well' or 'haven't really thought much about it, but I suppose I'm an atheist', sound thoroughly insipid.

– There are things that just need to be left alone in their decadent dynamics, to ensure that you're not distracted by them.

For once, it would remove everything extreme about the genre – besides the intoxicant debauchery we primarily socialise with.

– Ah, when people tell you all about their seething misanthropy... while drinking with you at a concert or a festival, eh? Anyway, it's obvious how deep this runs but I must say there are more important matters competing for my attention. Just pure honesty here, not trying to be arrogant.

So what's TEITANBLOOD's move from here, focusing on your next album?

– Affirmative. There's already some groundwork done, we have a general idea of the length, concept and artwork. Note that we never actually stop working but as I stated earlier – what could possibly be the point of reporting every step of the way?

FORNDOM

FORNDOM IS SCANDINAVIAN FOLK ART PERFORMED THROUGH A FRAME-
WORK OF AMBIENT MUSIC. WITH FERVOUR FOR NORSE SPIRI-
TUALITY AND A FOUNDATION IN ACADEMIA, WE HEAR
ABOUT THE GODS AND GIANTS, OF RUNES
AND MEN — AND THE IMPORTANCE
OF KILLING YOUR
SELF.

The seed that sprouted into FORNDOM was first sown when amateur photographer Ludvig Swärd stumbled upon a Tumblr profile that combined music and photography. Since he was already operating a popular photo page on the same platform, he decided to try a similar approach by creating his own compositions.

– The result was later released as the “Flykt” EP, says Ludvig. At the time, this wasn’t really meant as much more than a background soundtrack for my images. The turning point came in November 2012, when I saw Swedish dark ambient artist Draugurinn perform live.

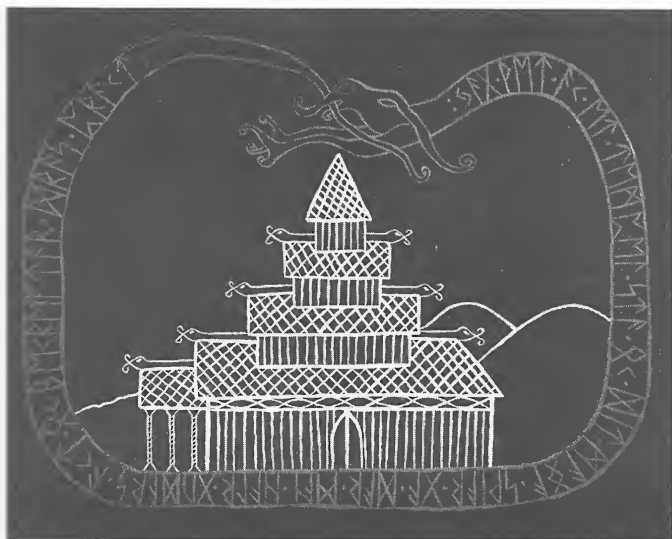
It was then Ludvig realised that he wanted to compose ambient music heavily permeated by Nordic folk traditions. Coming from a family of musicians, and having prior training in traditional instruments, he went on to do exactly that.

– “Flykt” was released for free on YouTube and Spotify in November 2013, and grew more popular than I could ever have imagined. The early material isn’t really representative of FORNDOM though, which became a serious project with the debut album “Dauðra Dura” (2016).

That’s why “För världarna nio” is the only EP opus he performs live. The song in question is the first track on “Flykt”, whereas the album begins with “Nio natters led”. Both titles contain a reference to the number nine, which I first assumed to be an intentional arrangement.

– No, he says somewhat surprised, it’s not. I hadn’t even thought about it. The number nine is sacred in Norse mythology, it can be found everywhere. We have the nine worlds, Oden hung from the world-tree for nine days and nights, and equally long was Hermod’s ride into Hel.

The sacrificial blot fires burned with nine kinds of wood; there are nine great lindworms, and only nine gods survive Ragnarok. The mysterious valknut symbol consists of three interlocking triangles that together form nine points.



– The number repeats itself over and over. It often occurs in connection to rites of passage; the departure from one state of life and entering a new.

I caught up with Ludvig in Stockholm on November 26 – the day after his second-ever performance with FORNDOM, courtesy of Tänk på Döden and featuring also Draugurinn and Einar Selvik of WARDRUNA. He started the concert by coating a wooden statue of Oden with blood.

– It was a symbolic sacrifice, or blot for those who prefer that word. By bloodying the statue, the same life-force that courses through us also stains the god – an abstract submission solidified with the physical.

It celebrates the animal whose blood was used, he says, and gives it purpose in death by helping something grow.

– Another aspect of this reciprocity is that I feel like I’ve invested a lot of time and effort into FORNDOM and that particular live performance. Especially given my ongoing studies.

Besides an academic pursuit of the subject matter at Stockholm University, Ludvig personally subscribes to the Old Norse outlook. He points out that his beliefs have little to do with modern terms such as ‘Asatru’, ‘Odinism’, and so forth. When he makes reference to the gods, it’s more in the sense of archetypes as guiding beacons than deities expecting adulation.

– Oden is a guide for my actions, not in control of them – it’s more primal philosophy than rule-laden doctrine. Something reminiscent of an old grandfather who can teach you valuable lessons about life, despite coming from another age with radically different societal norms.

So, it’s safe to say that you don’t pray or anything like that?

– We cannot worship the gods in the same manner they did a thousand years ago, trying to emulate their religious practices in our society makes no sense whatsoever. Adherence to a basic creed however, is applicable everywhere.

In recent years, Sweden has seen an increase of curiosity for the old ways – several new Asatru organisations have emerged and one of them has even been granted official status as a religious congregation.

– While the growing interest for the Old Norse religion is encouraging, I find it rather sad that people need to organise into groups and congregate wearing theatrical outfits.

This is what happens when said interest is kindled by a television series.

– Our ancestors from the era they seek to emulate never saw themselves as part of anything ecclesiastical, so I fail to see why we should amass in hierarchical structures just to express personal beliefs.

According to Ludvig, one will never reach the core of Old Norse spirituality without seeing the whole picture. One must stare deep into the abyss of gods, but also take into account social structures and contemporary ideologies.

– Otherwise, it will all remain a Christian interpretation of the religion – based solely on clerical sources tainted with biblical bias. A vanquished religion should not be studied in the archives of its conqueror.



The blot ceremonies these groups perform, how authentic are they?

– I know far too little about what they get up to when it comes to blot, but I can say for sure that whatever it is – it's not authentic. Then again, neither was the act I performed on stage last night. We know far too little of these customs to be able to replicate them with any historical accuracy.

Ludvig says that what he does on stage with FORNDOM is as a modern interpretation of archaic ideas. This is a methodology that complements the causal northern belief in the evolutionary nature of all things; stagnation is death – change is always a requisite for survival.

– The blot can fill a function if we see it in the same light as in the past; that the death of one form of life sanctions the existence of another. We should also remember that our forefathers were even willing to sacrifice their king, to then see people today offering up flowers picked an hour beforehand is absolutely laughable to me.

FORNDOM's logo has been the source of some speculation among the fan-base. Despite being asked repeatedly, Ludvig has kept his silence in hopes of someone figuring it out. There's been no such luck thus far unfortunately, so he finally relents.

– At the top we see the sun-wheel, symbolising life and light, followed by two ravens who represent knowledge and memory. Then we have the ships.

In Scandinavian prehistory, the ship was initially a symbol for the trade-routes designated for the sun; faring into warmer climates to bring back sacred bronze. It was later used to illustrate man's passage through death. In the FORNDOM context, he explains, the nautical crafts embody both.

I'm assuming this is connected to the iconic heathen ship burials and funeral pyres on water?

– This was actually very rare during the Viking Age and probably has more to do with films and other popular culture than actual history.

Ludvig says that in most cases, the funerary ships were probably meant as an afterlife possession.

– People would often be buried together with parting gifts from loved ones. It could be a horse or a dog as travel companion, or something as simple as a pair of shoes made especially for the afterlife. In most cases they would have served as a marking of wealth. There's been a few findings of aristocrats buried with vessels, and the volva of Öland, but that's about it really.

Ludvig is referring to a 10th century female leader of a local island community, she received a ship burial with both animal and human sacrifices. The volva are the shamans of the north, and this one was laid to rest dressed in bear pelts and with a large iron wand with sculpted details. She also had bronze plates with runic writing, unfortunately in such poor condition that they can't be deciphered.

– This is not my main subject and I'm certainly no expert, but I know of a few sources outside the myths that speak of the volva. One example is the *Saga of Erik the Red*, in which such a woman is summoned after a bad harvest strikes the newly colonised Greenland.

Telling the tale of when Scandinavian explorers discovered North America, the saga dates back to the 13th century. This is particularly relevant due to the fact that it was written in a time when there were still volva around. According to the book, they were as feared as they were respected.

– She wears a blue robe adorned with stones. Around her neck hangs glass beads and she's draped in a black lambskin hood lined with white cat-skin, and carries a crowned staff. From her belt hangs a large leather purse with items and herbs for witchcraft.

Sweden, soon to boast the world's first gender equality ministerium, had already implemented progressive measures to secure Iron Age women's access to the employment market.

– Magic was something connected with the feminine, men caught

using it would be ostracised for being unmanly and declared an *ergi*. This doesn't mean that men didn't practice *seidr*, as the Nordic mysticism is called, but it must have been highly unusual.

The volva are said to have had access to trance states, in which they would receive oracular visions bespeaking the future. Alas, there is little to nothing preserved about their techniques and practices.

– It has been proven archaeologically that they used cannabis along with similar plants and herbs, such as henbane.

Hyoscyamus niger, henbane, or Devil's eyes – is a member of the plant family known as nightshades. Other family members include notorious witch-herbs such as mandrake, *Datura* and belladonna.

– It is however important to point out that this was part of their work – to enhance their inner sight, not to get high and have a good time.

So there was no widespread stoner culture in Iron Age Scandinavia?

– Not to my knowledge, no. There's really nothing indicating that ordinary people used any drugs other than alcohol in daily life.

Drinking was not something meant for revelry either, it was a sacrament consumed to connect with the gods and one's community.

– Alcohol was shared and poured on the graves of the dead, and probably on idols of the gods. Excessive drinking to the point where one was unable to control oneself was frowned upon.

Returning once more to the logo. In the centre we see what I first assumed was two Algiz runes, but they are in fact meant to be Yggdrasil; the world tree – crown and roots respectively. This is in turn a metaphor for Sleipnir, Oden's eight-legged horse that carries the one-eyed god from branch to branch, world to world. It truly boggles the mind why none of the listeners figured this out on their own accord.

– The ships mark a threshold between the upper and lower halves; light and dark. Not darkness in a malevolent fashion – rather that which is shrouded in obscurity, out of sight. The trees make up a forest, which has the same significance as the sea; secrets hidden in the depths and what lurks beneath the surface.

Oden himself is depicted as glancing down at the forest and Yggdrasil's roots, towards the realm of the dead.

– This signifies a rite of passage; venturing into the unknown and learning from the mysterious by killing the self. An in-between state of universal belonging, where the old has died and the new yet to draw breath.

This exercise sounds precisely like what is usually referred to as ego dissolution, a topic that has been discussed on *Bardo Methodology* before.

Are you familiar with this concept, or 'psychic death' as it's known in Jungian terms?

– Of course. Jung and his theories are fundamental to comparative religious studies, and it does indeed sound like the very same thought behind it. Regardless of medium though, rites of passage should be anchored to the physical world. It must be a metamorphosis the person undergoes in real life, not only in the abstract.

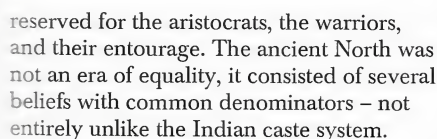
Ludvig says he also believes in the Norns – or fates, as the highest power. If one trusts that everything in life happens for a reason, it will make personal setbacks easier to handle.

– I believe that even the worst experiences can also bring something good with them. Even mortality isn't as terrifying if you see it as the closing of one chapter and beginning of a new. The philosophies of death in the Old Norse religion are very close to my heart.

He has actually found the auld northern bereavement so spell-binding that he wrote his Bachelor's essay on archaic Scandinavian afterlife perception.

– I came to the conclusion that Hel is not the equivalent of the Christian hell. It's a place for reuniting with one's forefathers, similar in many ways to what we know as Valhalla.

The most commonly known post-mortal abode, Valhalla was



– The gods themselves were highly connected with the social classes. For instance, it would have been inconceivable for someone with no connection to the elite to worship a god like Oden.

Commoners turned to Thor, Frö or Fröja – a custom that's left traces in many Scandinavian townships and birth-names to this day. They are particularly prevalent in Iceland, with the small island nation having no name traditions in relation to Oden at all.

– The original Icelandic settlers were refugees fleeing the Norwegian crown. The title of king was inseparable from Oden, as ancient Scandinavian royalty often made claims of being his descendants.

Ludvig mentions that in academia today, researchers have started noticing patterns in the Old Norse religion where the mythological world overlaps with the mundane. Meaning, much of what was previously assumed to be of strictly fantastical origin could very likely have a rational explanation.

– Kings were believed to have descended from the gods, and therefore assumed the role of what today would be called priests. There are theories that Oden was in fact a man like everyone else – but raised to godhood in death.

It was often great warriors who became kings. With legacies taking on a life of their own, the hero could eventually have been remembered and venerated as a living god – his brood might therefore be said to have some validity to their claims of divine bloodlines.

– The myths are full of gods marrying and having sex with female giants. And in actual history we see how, for example, Norwegian king Harald Fairhair fell in love with a Sami woman with whom he had four children.

The poetic version of Harald Fairhair's tale claims that his Sami wife, Snøfrid Svåsesdotter, was posthumously discovered to have been a witch. The king is said to have been so enraged that he developed a murderous hatred for sorcery, to the extent where he had his own son Ragnvald slain for practicing *seidr*.

– If we then look deeper into what in Norse religion is connected to the esoteric, we see that it's primarily 'the giants' that have this association. The word that's most commonly used for them, *jotun*, derives from 'eating much', or 'to consume' and has nothing to do with height or size.

Many of the older sources, such as ones written by 12th century Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson – author of the *Prose Edda*, men-



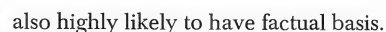
tion a connection between the Jotun and a people known as Finns. Ludvig explains that they have nothing to do with Finnish people, it's an old Scandinavian term for the Sami.

– The Jotun are described as being close to the earth, rich in natural wisdom and skilled in witchcraft. There are other cases where the similarities are so blatant that you can't ignore them, like the giantess Skadi; known for hunting with a bow and arrow while skiing – precisely what the Sami did.

So, you're saying that the giants within the myths are actually Sami?

– That’s a matter of perspective – what I’m saying is that the mythological world has been inspired by historical conditions of that era. The stories are always better than the truth.

Ludvig says that while myths may work as an immaterial reflection of reality, they're



– This relation between the abstract and the tangible is something that resounds all throughout the lore. Examined in this manner, we no longer see them as simple stories based on fantasies but rather a mirroring of the real world.

Scandinavia was released from the freezing grip of the last Ice Age around 14 000 years ago. Some claim that memories of this endless winter survived down the millennia, preserved through the mythical Fimbulwinter. Ludvig is unimpressed.

– There's no way that a myth could survive for that long, especially not through fundamental changes in ideologies. The Fimbulwinter probably stems from events that occurred in the 6th century.

In the year 536, a volcano erupted somewhere in the northern hemisphere – spewing such an amount of dust particles across the sky that both Greek and Roman sources speak of the sun being usurped.

– This event turned the Italian mid-summer into full winter conditions, so one can only imagine what it must have been like up here in the north. The sun wasn't even visible for more than a year.

Four years later another volcano erupted, but in the southern hemisphere this time. Sulphur filled the stratosphere and the already freezing climate grew even harsher. This ushered in the period of history known as the Dark Ages. There are very few historical documents from this time – few written and less remain, but by all available accounts it wasn't a good time to be European.

– These events brought with them the coldest decade in Europe for the past two thousand years. Agriculture was hit especially hard, making it a lot tougher to live off the land which in turn caused widespread starvation.

As if gruelling famine from years of volcanic winter wasn't enough, 541 A.D. saw the arrival of the Plague of Justinian – now believed to have been a direct result of the conditions brought on by the eruptions. The epicentre was the young city of Constantinople – then capital city of the Roman Empire.

– It was named after Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor who two-hundred years earlier is believed to have compiled the canon of scripture we know as *The Holy Bible*.

In total, the plague is estimated to have claimed the lives of between twenty-five to fifty million people – that is thirteen to twenty-six percent of the world's population at the time.

Self-proclaimed ‘rune masters’ and rune magic in general isn’t something that moves Ludvig to any greater extent. On the contrary, he says there are no indications that runes had a central importance beyond that of a character set. As such, regarding them



as part of the Old Norse religion is an unsubstantiated theory.

– It's an alphabet, and that's what it should be interpreted as.

Ludvig speculates that the lack of books and documents written in runic script have contributed to this misconception.

– Wisdom can be gleaned from old Roman texts, just as it can from runes. The only difference is that runes never became a written system for telling long stories, ours was a culture with an oral tradition.

The runes are unquestionably based on the Latin alphabet, he adds, which in turn is unlikely to have fallen from the crown of Yggdrasil. Another incriminating fact is how they remained in use in Christian times.

– We know for example that heathen burials were outlawed, as were numerous other local customs connected to religion. Had runes been such a focal point, they would surely have been prohibited by the church.

The source of this confusion, he believes, is a mixture between various occult interests and 19th century Scandinavian nationalist currents. One such work I assume he's referring to with the former category is *Galdrabók – The Icelandic Book of Magic*.


– I've never read it, says Ludvig, it's not a part of the Old Norse section.

Dating back to the 1600s, it's a grimoire written by three Icelanders and a Dane. Besides a number of spells in both runic and Latin writing, it contains various sigils, invocations to entities of both Christian and Norse origin, and instructions on how to use herbs and other magical accessories.

– *Galdrabók* appears to combine surviving Icelandic folklore with Abrahamic mysticism, which has somehow morphed into a local esoteric tradition. That's the conclusion I can draw from what little I know about it.

He adds that he's not aware of any archaeological findings with single runes carved into them, they're only ever found as part of written text.

– What I find amusing is that so many people who claim interest in the Viking era use symbolism based on this work. The 'rune magic' it contains has no factual basis in the epoch.

Ludvig believes the runes to have far greater scholarly than metaphysical value, that they can enlighten us about Old Norse society. As an example, he takes the rune known as Odal: .

– The term 'Odal' was used to describe land passed down through generations, by rights of blood. We know archaeologically and historically that it was very important during the Nordic Iron Age to display the right of Odal.

Helvegen, the road to Hel, was paved with both the breathing and the buried. Ancestral ground claimed above as below; living descendants farming land strewn with the bones of their forefathers. Grave mounds of one's predecessors was how one made the claim of Odal.

– It was common to bury family members in connection with much older graves. This is believed to have been a marking, a unification with the ancient ones – relatives one never knew but highly respected. One could almost call it an ancestral cult.

As Christianity was introduced in the North, heathen burials and customs were outlawed, and rune stones were used instead of the Odal mounds. The monument would state who the stone was raised in memory for, and what his earthly belongings were.

– Each rune has individual significances, as well as cultural connections. But to bring out single runes and make unsubstantiated claims of magic, declaring them integral to the religion... It's a populist idea with no foundation in the factual. Sadly we see this more and more today, it leads us no closer to the wisdom of our past – rather further down into the darkness.

The *Hávamál* speaks of Oden receiving runes after his sojourn in the gallows tree, doesn't that sound a bit magical?

– The so-called 'Rúnatalspátr' states that he picks up runes, yes –

but I struggle to see how anyone could do that in a literal meaning. The plural form of the word, 'rúnar', also has to do with secrets. To 'take up a secret' could simply mean accumulation of previously unfamiliar knowledge.

The 'Rúnatalspátr' is the part of *Hávamál* that depicts Oden's sacrifice, hanging for nine days and nine nights. Ludvig wrote a university essay based on the study of these verses.

– The two main theories on this that are still in dispute today are whether it had to do with the actual sacrifice of a king, or a symbolic initiatory rite.

Ceremonial regicide was something that came out of desperation, when crops failed and famine ravaged the land. A mortal life given for the sustenance to grow, with no better fertiliser than the marrow of sovereigns.

– Back then I believed it was an initiation, but today I see more and more validity to the sacrificial assertion. We'll probably never find a definitive answer to this but there's evidence that speaks for both and perhaps it had dual meaning.

If so, the offering would have been the king's voluntary rite of passage; closing the chapter of his earthly existence for rewards in knowledge available in the after-life.

– What's clear is that through most of *Hávamál*, 'secrets' is how you should interpret 'runes'. When someone is mentioned as carving runes, the interpretation should also be that of secrets – but in the sense of hidden wisdom.

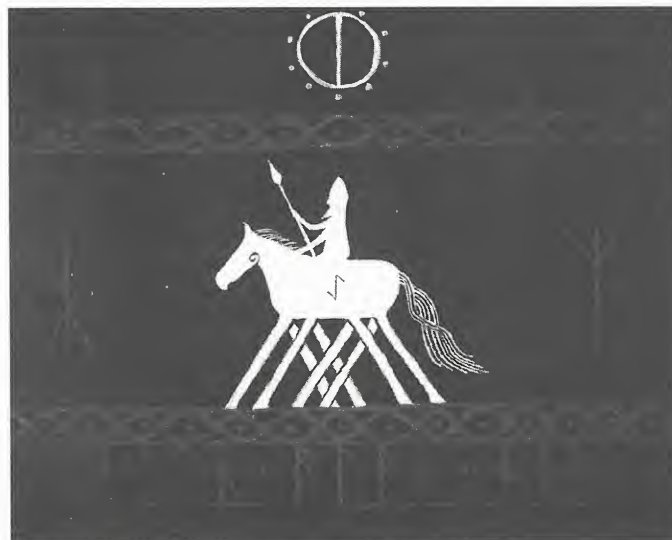
Another conclusion from his research is that the place called Nifelhel was meant for those who had not only died but also been forgotten. It was therefore a sacred duty to honour the memory of your forefathers, and lead a life that would inspire descendants to uphold yours.

– In the Old Norse religion, death is not the end but rather the passage to another realm, a reunification with ancestors and other loved ones. To live and feast as long as there was someone left in mortal life that remembered.

Not all reminiscent notoriety is desirable, however. Those whose names echo in shame among the halls of their people are believed to have faced Nástrand, the shore of corpses. This was reserved for the most despicable society has to offer – the criminals; the liars, traitors, and oath-breakers.

What's next for FORNDOM?

– I'm currently writing the new album, a slow process unlikely to be completed before the summer of 2017. My work with FORNDOM always continues and I'll keep striving for betterment – musically as well as aesthetically.



LUDVIG SWÄRD

MGŁA

MGŁA

M,
THE FACE-
LESS ARTIST OF
POLAND'S MGŁA, EXPLAINS
WHY HE WANTS ALL FOCUS ON
THE ART ITSELF — AND HOW A CYN-
ICAL NIHILIST JUSTIFIES TAKING THE STAGE
TO PREACH TO THE MASSES A BELIEF IN NOTHING.

From its inception in 2002, KRIEGSMASCHINE had been the duo's main band – with MGŁA functioning as an occasional studio project. This arrangement lasted until 2012, when the mists absorbed the war wagon and the latter was reserved for recording activity while the former brought to the stage.

– Due to typical life stuff happening, people moving and so on, regular rehearsals were no longer possible with KRIEGSMASCHINE so we were unable to keep playing live.

Instead of exchanging the line-up, the two of them decided to have a go at MGŁA with a full band setting. Having recruited live members ShellShocked on bass and guitarist Silencer from MEDICO PESTE, they rehearsed for almost a full year before playing their first show.

– First year of live activity we played five shows, the year after it was nine shows, then sixteen and now it's forty.

In our initial email exchange before meeting, M explained that the lack of interviews available is due to MGŁA best being experienced rather than studied. I find it strange how knowing more about the band would detract from the experience.

– MGŁA should be represented by what we do in the studio and on stage, at least in the context of core ideas. The band communicates in a much more focused and compressed way than I ever could, talking like this over a coffee – it takes hundreds if not thousands of hours to complete what you ultimately hear on a CD. MGŁA is a distilled form of our innermost thoughts and comments.

There is an additional reason why M feels he'd rather let the band represent itself.

– I'm not really a particularly interesting person – the compelling stuff is my music, not my self. I'm just a guy.

The desire for inhuman representation is mirrored by their stage attire, which is tailored to shift focus from the musicians to their music.

– We wear hoodies and leather jackets, effectively making us indistinguishable from ninety percent of the audience – the only difference is that our faces are draped. We seek uniformity to remove the ego of our person, leaving nothing but a vessel – a tool. On stage we're not individuals, we are a unit.

M's lyrics aren't written in the genre-typical short bursts of attempted infernal poetry, they look more like a flowing social commentary divided up into paragraphs rather than verses.

– Linguistically, they're not yet at the level I'd like them to be but I'm trying to accomplish something that can stand on its own merit and makes sense even without sound. They're not simply complementary rhythmic structures for the instruments; they are of equal value as the musical content so I dedicate significant time to them.

They come off as heavily laden with cynical nihilism; does this reflect your personality?

– To a large degree – yes, I'm afraid so. The easiest way this can

be summed up is that there are men of faith and men of doubt; I am of the latter type.

Going by said lyrics, one might get the impression that he views his fellow humans as little more than breathing disappointments.

– Lessons of life in general, there have been lots and lots of incidents that contribute to my general worldview. Believe me, I'd love to be more optimistic but any such attempts tend to be disproven. I try to be a kind person and an easy-going guy but I have very limited trust. When talking to me, it takes quite a while to actually speak to me and not just my outer shell.



LUKASZ JASZAK



Isn't it slightly contradictory though; travelling around the world and taking the stage to proclaim your disinterest in people and life in general?

– No, I don't think so. That is not my purpose for doing this; it's for the experience itself. I'm hardly ever angry, rarely happy – I don't feel emotions the way I think most people do. The one moment I can repeatedly feel something is when playing music.

Emotions are precisely what he believes should govern and empower music.

– Concepts, themes, aesthetics and ideologies – all secondary; what lies at the very foundation of black metal music is the emotional content.

No matter the conceptual theme – as long as there is genuine passion invested in it, M believes it will shine through. Academic accuracy or poetic mastery means nothing if the voice conveying it lacks conviction.

– If someone is praying to the goat in his lyrics and actually means it – in the sense that they react with it somehow; interesting things can come out of this. Naming every single one of Shub Niggarath's thousand young won't make anything worthwhile – but a guy actually worshipping the fucking head of a goat, this could potentially generate something meaningful.

He ponders for a moment before adding:

– I think that might very well have been the most in-depth statement that's been made by me in relation to MGLA.

Despite claiming to be happiness resistant, I find it hard to believe that the band's recent success doesn't brighten his day.

– Of course, it helps. Basic things like music equipment for example – for the first time we don't have to worry about affording new amps, cables, stands and other accessories. The album sales pay for our backline, we're constantly improving it.

This almost makes it sound as if the happiness is logistical in origin, rather than satisfaction from having created something others enjoy.

– Not at all, feedback is much appreciated. I have a great deal of respect for people who take the time to listen to the music, read the lyrics and come up with comments and observations – basically react in any way. It's always surprising to me that people appreciate

our music since MGLA is carefully moulded after our own preferences.

He's not joking – the latest album "Exercises in Futility" (2015) was crafted entirely from conception to creation by M and Darkside, with literally no third party insight.

– The two of us did everything – composing, recording, performance, mixing, mastering, graphic design, lyrics, even releasing it to some extent. At no time during the recording process did we play the songs for other people. Our idea was to form it purely after the vision we had, with no outside influence and I believe we succeeded in this.

From its inception, all of MGLA's music has been recorded in their own studio – No Solace.

– It's basically a rehearsal space that's been worked into a studio, it has all equipment we need. It's constantly being upgraded, as are my skills as a recording engineer.

Besides his own work, he's also worked as a studio engineer and producer for bands such as fellow countrymen INFERNAL WAR and CULTES DES GHOULES.

– It's great because I get to work with friends and leave my prints on albums I think are extraordinary. It's also a learning process for me, because everything I do in regard to recording and mixing is then experience collected – knowledge I can channel into my own work.

All of MGLA's albums have been co-released by their own label – also called No Solace, and Finland's Northern Heritage Records.

Are you going to stick with them or are you entertaining other offers?

– We get them all the time but releasing our work in cooperation with Northern Heritage is perfect. I think this is the way it's going to stay as it gives us complete control over everything. We don't have to schedule interviews or do any PR; most importantly we don't have to do any sort of meet-and-greet shit or other things you'd expect at some point when working with a bigger label.

Their choice of partner has not been entirely without complication. Even though no one is accusing MGLA of political extremism they have recently been targeted by 'anti-fascists', which led to the lone German date of their upcoming September tour with BEHEMOTH being cancelled. From what I could ascertain by running online discussions through Google Translate, the outrage stems from Northern Heritage having previously collaborated with a Finnish black metal band that are deemed controversial.

– Yes, he confirms while shaking his head, that was the problem. The venue is managed by some kind of left wing youth organisation so when the show was announced they had their local antifa perform background checks on the bands.

Having discovered their dubious associations, the venue demanded that MGLA issue a statement denouncing their label.

– Obviously, from the moment you receive this type of email, you know you're not going to play there. We simply told the truth; we are a black metal band and we release our music on black metal labels. We haven't signed our deal for political reasons but we support Northern Heritage one hundred percent – if someone has a problem with that then so be it.

One can't help but notice how many media outlets who were aghast when BELPHEGOR were beset by Christians and then banned by the authorities in Russia, never seem to object to this kind of censorship.

– I recently did an interview for a German magazine and there were of course a couple of questions on politics and black metal. I explained that I'm not interested at all; if you want to separate politics from art, don't ask the artists about politics in the first place.

M's views on most things material are readily available in the lyrics but spirituality appears to be a theme left mostly unexplored.

– Not entirely; there is metaphysics in MGLA, just not from the usual angles. It's more mysticism than magic – no ceremonial



accessories, no candles, robes or any of the usual esoteric attire. It's not so much a visual element as it is conceptual; finite man versus the infinite something.

He speculates that being drawn to the aesthetic side of things is human nature, behaviour that seems to enjoy prevalence regardless of theological outlook.

– The whole idea of ritual, no matter if it's the Roman Catholic mass or rites from the Order of Nine Angles, is that there are predefined sets of movements and words – then incense, sounds, specific clothes and so on. I'd be inclined to say that a lot of focus is being put... well, wasted if you ask me, on the aesthetics rather than the actual core. My interest in spirituality is to the highest possible extent devoid of this aspect.

M has self-diagnosed himself as 'spiritually challenged'.

– Look at the latest album cover artwork, it shows a blind man reaching for something but gripping nothing. If you add the pieces together – the spiritual outlook that's been reflected in MGLA, you'll find that we genuinely would like to connect to something – to relate to something metaphysical, yet all we grasp is black void.

The cover artwork in question goes rather well with the lyrical theme, which is why I first assumed it was commissioned artwork.

– No, he clarifies, we have stolen it – it was made by the nineteenth century French illustrator Marcel Roux. When working on the layout for "Enemy of Man" (KRIEGSMASCHINE, 2014), we were looking through various pictures I'd accumulated.

Suddenly, they found themselves staring at the motif that ended up as the visual representation of the "Exercises in Futility".

– At the very first glance we knew it was perfect, with the blind man...

The one referenced in the lyrics?

– Yes. The funny part is that the lyrics were written only after we found the cover image, so it ended up leaving an imprint on the music too.

"There's something about the rigid posture of a proper, authentic blind. As if extended arms reached to pass his blindness onto others."

These lyrics are in turn influenced by French-Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran.

– We find inspiration in many things – art, philosophy and literature; then the two of us act as filter to select what we see most fitting

and it ends up as MGLA.

A new album is in the works, their first after the so-called commercial breakthrough. It should be interesting to see how this affects the relative musical consistency that has characterised their sixteen-year lifespan thus far.

– MGLA started out as my revelation and at some point it became the shared vision of two people. Darkside is not only the drummer, he's one hundred percent involved in the band and everything related to it. We have a vision that needs to be realised, I doubt there'll be any drastic changes as we still have a lot of work remaining in this aspect. I have no idea what the future holds for us, it's a path being paved as we walk it – but as long as our work is fuelled by emotions, we'll continue doing it.

ADDENDUM – FEBRUARY 2017

Eight months have passed since our last conversation, so I decided to check in with M to see how things have been since then.

– Busy. We rehearse to death, trying to raise our standard for each passing day. Back when we first started performing live, my initial plan was to play rather rarely, thinking we would exhaust our energy if we did more than say, one concert per month.

Surveying the band's recent tour schedule leads me to suspect that either this plan or the theory it rested upon has suffered collapse.

– This approach is still relevant to a certain degree, although the scale of it has changed as experience keeps proving me wrong. Live activity with MGLA is an exercise in discipline and the focus is now greater than ever.

In our previous conversation, we touched on the irony that is a symphony of cynicism enjoying such impressive commercial success. Not much seems to have changed since then, in either regard.

– It would indeed appear to go well for the band – at least in terms of logistics, recognition, sales and general 'success', as you call it. While these things are of course appreciated, they are mere by-products and not the actual purpose. The second we feel uninspired or burnt out, MGLA will dissipate. I doubt this is going to happen anytime soon though, the demons are aplenty and bile is nourished daily.

Given your confessed emotional sterility, may I ask when you suffered your most recent bout of furious rage?

– If I recall correctly, the last time I was really angry would have been March 2016. It was immediately following a MGLA performance, where the venue staff apparently didn't bother to read neither technical rider provided beforehand nor handouts given during soundcheck.

He explains his behaviour with being afflicted by a severe allergy against, and I quote, 'lazy assholes'.

– The fact that I don't spend my days boiling with hatred and foaming at the mouth is largely owed to a combination of luck and having developed skills in avoiding people of that sort.

I'm equally curious about his last experience with sincere happiness, and what induced this.

– Genuine, pure joy... I can't really remember. There's an expression that goes, 'to snort with laughter'; I do more snorting than actual laughing. There's a hint in the last track on "Exercises in Futility".

My succeeding inspection of said lyrics yields the phrase, 'As if the irony was more than a defence mechanism and we could actually laugh for a change.'

– I must confess however, that I spent a good deal of today with a sincere grin on my face – largely thanks to the lecture of Jim Goad's new book, *The New Church Ladies*. Well, it did admittedly include some schadenfreude.

What's next for MGLA?

– All live activity will be put on hold this autumn in order to fully focus on the new album. As always, it's done when it's done.



JOANNA OSOBA

THE AJNA OFFENSIVE

OREGON- BASED LABEL AND PUBLISHING HOUSE AJNA WAS
NAMED AS A CHARGE TO ACTION. ITS FOUNDER SPEAKS
OF CELEBRATIONS OF NATURE AND SILENT CON-
TEMPLATION, AND HOW HE WAS LED BY
DEATH THROUGH THE DOORS OF
PERCEPTION, DRUNK FROM
THE NECTAR OF THE
DEVIL'S BER-
RIES.



– What would become known as The Ajna Offensive was founded in 1992, says its proprietor Tyler Davis, when I met this man who had a musical project called PLECID.

Enter Stephen O'Malley – mostly known for his work with the roving reverberation that is SUNN O))). Tyler and Stephen would later collaborate on one of the finest publications in underground metal – *Descent Magazine*. In 1999, after publishing five issues and having interviewed just about every band deemed relevant, they put it to rest.

– I'd released a bit of music under a different moniker in previous years and felt as if it might be a good time to go back at it – start again with a new name and fresh approach, as it were. At that point, there were no real logistical or conceptual guidelines in place.

What did you have in mind when you came up with the name?

– Ajna is the third eye, the chakra located between your two visible eyes. Ajna also means 'command', and I found the idea of this word meaning something militaristic quite appealing. The offensive in combination with this speaks to the active, assuming-command sort-of-approach that I'd like to think I apply to daily life.

The concept also symbolises intuition and clarity of vision, areas he believes houses room for improvement.

– I put this name ahead of myself as a challenge; to fulfil and live up to the idea of what I aspire to. It was a marker for myself, I do this constantly in my world.

For scene purveyors, the Ajna Offensive brand carries connotations that transcend music – its customers having come to harbour a set of expectations on what the label releases.

– I prefer that to bands who proclaim themselves 'a perfect fit' because they have 'total respect' for the label. I'm utterly disturbed, because only NEGATIVE PLANE ever got that right.

Another band that obviously did something right is REVERORUM IB MALACHT; masterminded by Emil Lundin (ex-

OFERMOD, DÖDFÖDD), who was once a 'death worshipper' and black metal musician, now a Catholic convert since almost a decade back.

– When people ask me what kind of label I have, I say 'religious music'. I've also always said that if I could ever work with David Tibet (CURRENT 93), Estonian composer Arvo Pärt or any other number of so-called Christians or Catholics, I'd be more than willing to do so. Emil studied dead languages for many, many years and lived in a monastic way for quite a while. This exhibits intense amounts of focus and discipline, I respected him for that.

Living up to one's word – doing something instead of just preaching about it, is a trait Tyler values highly.

– Listen to his music on the two albums I released; incredibly atmospheric and uncomfortable. It's not unlike many European churches that I've spent time walking through, sitting in and admiring.

Tyler also operates Ajna Bound, his publishing house.

– We live in a world of 'guilt by association', and having a dedicated site for my books is an attempt to separate one entity from another. Perhaps naïve, an observant publisher that I seek a license from could very easily put two and two together and quash my aspirations. It also allows certain customers the freedom of avoiding all the music content and focus on literature exclusively.

The Ajna brand's first book was released in 2002, the now completely sold out *Infernal Proteus: A Musical Herbal*.

– One night while intoxicated I realised that plants, music and art – some of the most important things in my life, could be woven together into a book. This had never really been done before, to my knowledge.

The quest to celebrate nature through pictorial and musical art resulted in a richly illustrated compendium that includes four CD's. They contain the work of forty different musicians from thirteen countries; all seeking to capture the audible essence of a plant they selected for themselves.

– I can't stand some of the songs on it, but others love the ones I hate. For example; I really don't like 'dance music' or whatever the proper term is, but HEKATE portrayed morning glory perfectly with this music full of beats that I just loathe. All the while, I have to fully acknowledge that the plant moves at a hypnotically alarming rate through and over the garden and whatever else within its insatiable reach.

Any chance of a second volume?

– I've often thought about it, but I'm not versed enough in bands that could pull it off. I haven't paid much attention to the ambient, neo-folk, what-have-you sorts of genres in the last ten plus years.

Tyler himself made a humble contribution, if only inspirationally rather than musically.

– At some point during the designing of the book I ended up with a systemic case of poison oak. It wasn't the first time, but every bit as miserable.

Coming into contact with this nasty weed will leave the affected skin with a feverishly itching and painful rash that could take weeks to subside.

– I ended up telling Keith (Brewer) from TAIN'T about my misfortune and he found it so funny that he created a song about his local menace, poison ivy – which offers the same miserable gifts. If you've ever suffered through the experience, his track captures the insanity perfectly.

belladonna

Another noteworthy trivia concerns the mandrake song, by Annabel Lee of BLOOD AXIS. The percussive instrument used is a bear mandible, which is a drum made from the jaw of an actual bear.

- A good friend of mine studied traditional Native American medicine under her grandmother, she's been an herbalist her whole life. After I gave her the book, she mentioned that mandrake is bear-spirit medicine and was very impressed that Annabel chose this instrument.

Ever inquisitive, I decided to investigate whether or not this was intentional.

- No, says Annabel Lee, I didn't know that - thanks for the insight. I chose the bear mandible for other reasons, but obviously it pointed itself out to me.

I'm curious to know what manner of shrubby Tyler would have been extolling, had the tables been turned and he was an artist invited to participate.

- Back then it would've been something I hadn't experimented with; a plant that I would've wanted to try to understand, to intuit and commune with in an unbiased fashion. Perhaps henbane, or the San Pedro cactus - definitely something with mind-altering qualities. All of them still terrify me to this day, and have my utmost respect.

The one that instills the greatest fear is known under many names; deadly nightshade, banewort, Devil's berries, naughty man's cherries and the beautiful death.

- Ah, he says fondly, *Atropa belladonna*. She's the one that almost killed me, or so I romantically tell myself. Belladonna is one of the classic plants you hear about in European folklore and legends about witchcraft, along with monkshood, mandrake and henbane; thus, one of the plants I'm the most drawn to. She was also the first one I was able to successfully grow.

Belladonna has been used in herbal medicine for centuries; it is anti-inflammatory and an effective pain reliever, it can alleviate motion sickness and a variety of other ailments. This is, however, in microscopic dosages.

- Like all of the witch herbs, it's common to read dramatically differing accounts of their properties. I now understand this.

Anything above miniscule doses can range from terrifying hallucinations of primarily insectoid, demonic and arachnoid nature - to acute delirium, psychosis, permanent mental scarring, or even death. Just two berries or one leaf have proven lethal to adults.

- I've had a few radically different experiences with her. The first two were in a group setting during a weekend of ritual and music, most of those present dosed them-



selves with a tincture I'd made from thirteen belladonna berries in apple cider vinegar.

Prepared by someone with the requisite knowledge, belladonna and some of its relatives from the nightshade family such as datura can be used for esoteric exploration. Incense is one use and potions another; these are the proverbial witches' brews from the cauldrons of folklore, and Tyler had decided to take a sip.

- I encountered death itself and was led on a most profound journey of discovery. The second night of the ritual was less personal in terms of the plant and I but equally divine being in a forest illuminated by bonfires with everyone present drunk from the same tonic.

Fast forward several years, to Hallow's Eve in 2006.

- I'd promised myself some days prior

belladonna

that Samhain was going to be the night. I was determined to meet the elusive cloaked figure again, and so refused to acknowledge the many warning signs that it wasn't something I should force.

Intuitively, Tyler knew it was a bad idea, but disregarding doubt and yielding to desperation for another audience with the great leveller – he drank.

– I met death alright; it shook me to the core of my very being, left me shaking and fragile and uncertain that I'd ever be free of its grasp.

Pressed for details, he doesn't recall much of the ordeal besides being scared out of his wits.

– Cold and clammy yet sweating and shaking; I recall falling off my bed and not having the energy to do much else than focus on the painful way I was slowly dying from poisoning myself.

Quoting the WebMD:

"Side effects can include dry mouth, enlarged pupils, blurred vision, red dry skin, fever, fast heartbeat, inability to urinate or sweat, hallucinations, spasms, mental problems, convulsions, and coma."

Sensing that something was very wrong, he shuddered at the recognition of belladonna overindulgence symptoms.

– I recounted every horror story I'd ever read, my otherwise selective memory now far keener than I'd ever thought possible.

He spent the night investing all strength he could muster into drinking as much water as possible.

– Finally, things started to abate as my body began to process and neutralise the toxin. I retired my plant explorations while mentally recovering, in fact I was sober for two years after that night.

A relative of belladonna that also grows on the Davis property is an equally notorious nightshade, brugmansia. As it would seem with most of the vegetation on his domain, Tyler has intimate floral knowledge of this one too.

– Someone I knew used to hang brugmansia blossoms around his room, claiming it produces a heavily intoxicating air. I decided I had to try something to that effect.

He's hesitant to reveal too much, declaring it an experience better 'self-inflicted' than described.

– I suggest you find a tree in bloom, harvest enough blossoms to make a garland – thirteen being a proper number in this case, and see how long you can wear it. Within twenty minutes you'll start to succumb to the omnipotent effects of the fragrance. Vice did a documentary about this plant, filmed in Colombia where the seeds are powdered and then used to turn people into 'zombies'.

This preparation is known as 'The Devil's breath', it's used on the unsuspecting by criminals who get the target to inadvertently

inhale the powder by blowing it in their face. One communicative ambassador of the local flora Tyler still has a working relationship with is the enigmatic *Salvia divinorum*. The Diviner's sage – the obvious choice for the interdimensional vagabond with insatiable wanderlust; what's essentially a mint-plant is considered the world's most potent naturally occurring hallucinogen.

– She was inherited with the property, smuggled back from Oaxaca several years prior to our taking over her care.

Salvia divinorum is native only to an isolated cloud forest at the foot of the Sierra

Nothing happened; I took this as a sign that I'm not meant to commune with her that way, since I can chew the fresh leaf.

Chewing is the traditional method of the Mazatec Indians, who are indigenous to the area. Their shamans use salvia for ritual purposes, as a religious sacrament. For the proper experience, fresh leaves from a living plant are required.

– It was silly of me to try to approach her any other way. Why make things more complicated? When you chew her she takes about twenty minutes to enter your system – as opposed to every story I've heard about



Madre de Oaxaca mountain ranges in southern Mexico. Very little is known of its origins, botanists have yet to determine whether the plant is the result of human artificial selection or a natural hybrid.

– Despite having a farm and living off the land, I'm not necessarily blessed with a green thumb. Yet somehow or another, I've managed to do right by my salvias – she can handle just enough neglect that she does alright under my care.

Most readers familiar with salvia are likely to think of YouTube videos showing people smoking extremely potent extracts and subsequently suffering complete meltdowns. Merely taking a few dried leaves and consuming them through a pipe will take about thirty seconds to induce states of visionary trance, full ego dissolution, encounters with celestial beings, and out of body experiences.

– Once I dried some of her and smoked.

smoking; immediate transport from one's corporeal form.

Oral ingestion has all of the qualities of smoking, though less intense as the journey takes hours instead of being compressed into minutes.

– In my various interactions with her, they've all differed widely. Most of the times I've chosen to consume the leaves with others I wanted to initiate. I keep getting increasingly more receptive to her; the last time two leaves were enough to keep me under her spell for two and a half hours.

The property mentioned is where Tyler has lived for the past fifteen years, located in Jacksonville, Oregon. 'Twenty-five minutes to the post office with two stop signs between here and there.' Before settling down, he was somewhat of a drifter.

– I've lived all over the US; outside of Boston and Chicago, then Oakland, Florida, Arizona, Olympia and Indiana.

my belladonna

Tyler began dreaming of having his own piece of land in the countryside when he was in his twenties.

– I can't stand living in close proximity to so many people, dealing with the noises and smells and psychic energy. I like cities and what they have to offer for about three or four days – that's when I start getting very uncomfortable and generally unpleasant to myself and others.

Any plans on starting a family?

– No, there are too many people on this planet. My concept of family might be an outdoor cat that eats rodents, some chickens

perfect sense for people on certain spiritual paths. Particularly those abiding by the karmic laws, who try to avoid the wheel of Samsara, would probably want to avoid eating the flesh of creatures that have spent their every waking breath being miserable.

– By this reasoning, animal products would carry the toxicity within its being; spiritually tainting tissue, milk and eggs. Just imagine what shit humans carry with them from single isolated incidents in their youth or otherwise, then apply that same logic to animals.

Tyler doesn't believe in karma at this

writing he did immediately following the experience:

"It was almost like a militaristic religious exercise (as I romantically picture such things): long days with no room for deviation from the routine and a very ascetic sort of existence. No external distractions: no talking, no books, no writing utensils, no touching another person, no eye contact. This was called, 'the noble silence'."

– Our days started at 4am and meditation lasted for twelve and a half hours each day. After day five I was assigned a cell in which I could spend all my time, minus the mandatory 'group sittings'.

He found the seclusion the tiny chamber offered to be his preferred space. Despite having no locking doors, you could close it with the option of being submerged in total darkness.

– It was better than a room where half the people were sick; coughing and sneezing and emitting unpleasant odours.

At evening time they'd watch video presentations hosted by a spokesperson for the sanctuary, preparing the alumni for the following day. He went over what they'd been focusing on and explained what might be going on in mind and body.

– It only got annoying on day nine when he began trying to convert us. Otherwise it was all very hands-off, and his little chants were quite soothing.

Tyler describes the experience as 'half of the time was hell, the other nirvana'.

– No amount of meditation and lotus postures can prepare you for a twelve-hour session. Each day presented new pains; first it would be calves, the next thighs, and then shoulders and so the rotation went.

Sitting in a lotus-like position for longer stretches means propping yourself up and pulling your shoulders back so you don't curl up over the course of the meditation.

– Days two to four were probably the most noticeable, after that I started to adjust. All in all, it's something I'm proud to have put myself through but I don't think I'd ever do it again. I know I'm not a Buddhist and have tonnes of problems with their approach to the world as a natural force.

He mentions sticking points such as the whole concept of reincarnation and ultimately breaking the wheel of misery and sorrow by letting go of craving, aversion and ignorance.

– Despite that, I tried very hard to not be judgemental when I was at the retreat. In reflection, I think I did a good job of letting go and submitting to their version of reality for those first nine and a half days. Then the proselytising kicked in at which point the fortress walls were erected, soldiered and viciously protected from invaders.

While on the subject of trials, the last time I met Tyler in person he laid one upon me. He said that out of everyone he'd given



and hopefully a pair of peacocks again since a bear ate the last few. Perhaps I'll try honey bees again, having suffered colony collapses two years in a row now.

One would think the recluse would favour feral companionship but says if forced to choose, he prefers human interaction.

– I've volunteered at a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre for two years now and find that I have no resonance with most animals. Vultures – yes, but I don't have any greater attachment now than I did two years ago to otters or wolves or any other number of animals that I help tend to.

Tyler was vegetarian for nine years, vegan for eight of those.

– When we bought the land; the goal was to be able to kill, butcher and eat our own meat. We wanted to better understand the role everything plays, and to get away from processed foods.

Philosophically, he says veganism makes

point, but says that the concept would go against the eating of meat and other animal products.

– Perhaps some animals have such small brains that it doesn't matter, but I'm more inclined to think that individual moments scare the spirit of any sentient being; it then carries these scars within 'til death. Then you have Buddhist sects that avoid meat, along with caffeine and even certain alliums like garlic and onions since it's said to excite the senses and stir the fires of desire.

As it turns out, Tyler knows a little bit more about Buddhism than most westerners.

– I'd heard about this Vispassana ten-day silent meditation retreat and thought it was time to check it out. This was around my fortieth birthday; it was also timely considering I was in some limbo with various other pursuits of a spiritual nature.

He shares an excerpt from some of the

it, not a single individual had ever followed through.

– After I released the Thomas Karlsson book, countless people asked me the same thing: Where to begin?

Thomas Karlsson is the founder of initiatory magical order Dragon Rouge, the book in question is called *Qabalah, Qliphoth and Goetic Magic* and was published in 2008. People wanted to know where to begin in regards to establishing some sort of a daily routine for approaching the subject matter.

– I told them all the same thing; ‘Try to focus on a candle flame for five minutes per day, preferably around the same time. If you can do that for a week, then proceed to ten minutes a day – and so on.’ Sounds easy, right? Wrong. It’s amazing the amount of excuses people come up with to avoid being left alone with their thoughts.

The point of the exercise is to assess what the mind does and where it goes during those minutes. One can then tailor the exercise to one’s own needs.

– Granted – the primary goal is to still the mind, so focusing on the flame is the main objective.

What do you currently have brewing with the Offensive and Ajna Bound?

– Books, music – a few other ideas of both esoteric and exoteric nature. Other than the HEAD OF THE DEMON’s “Sathanas Trismegistos” finally appearing on vinyl, I’m very hesitant to mention many of the projects because some of them have been dragging on for up to two years.

Ajna will be reprinting the previously mentioned *Qabalah, Qliphoth and Goetic Magic* as soon as another large book project is out of the way.

– I guess I can mention it here for the first time, since it’s finally feeling inevitable: An obsessive Italian fan wrote this insanely comprehensive book on the band GOBLIN, Ajna Bound will reprint a version of it. It’s edited down a bit, with a more striking layout and many, many rare photos, as well as interviews with several members of the band, past and present. It will be called *Seven Notes in Red*.

Tyler adds that he has his sights set on many other book projects, but limitations of several sorts prevent him from taking on more than one or two at a time.

– One music project I can mention because I’ve received everything necessary to make it happen; a reprint of this rather rare Japanese seven-inch from a band called WHITE HELL.

ADDENDUM – FEBRUARY 2017

The online version of this article also featured Darragh O’Laoghaire of Invictus Productions and VIRCOLAC tackling the flame challenge. For the printed edition, we turn the tables on Tyler and have him try

out a hyperventilation-induced astral flight propellant. Should anyone from the readership find themselves engaging in this, I’d be delighted to hear the results.

INSTRUCTIONS. Sit or lay down on a flat surface and close your eyes, eye-mask is highly recommended. Slowly inhale as deeply as possible through mouth and nose, breathing in with the entire upper body; arch torso and lean your head back



gently as you go. Hold your breath while imagining yourself floating upwards, until it feels as if you plateau and are about to sink – perhaps five to ten seconds. Let go and exhale naturally along with the sinking motion, bow slightly forward and curve the back. Eject about half of the air from your lungs before repeating the procedure, filling them even more next time around. Perform in total thirteen times with gradually increasing momentum; light-headedness and physical tingling sensations are indications of progress.

On the thirteenth and final breath, inhale to absolute maximum capacity. Despite lungs filling up, keep drawing air through the nose for about ten seconds; the feeling should be of energy flowing up the spine and into the brain, guiding your mental presence upwards. Relax your head and instead contract torso and chest, pushing oxygen from the diaphragm into the lungs. Eyelids shut but sight set on the centre forehead. Imagine the muscle movement used to open your eyes, but executed in the forehead. Retain your breath as long as possible – push through resistance with the mind, not physical force. If it feels like you can’t take another second, relax into it and find

second wind.

You are likely to experience pressure building in your head, almost as if levitating – merge your awareness with this feeling. Try not to be distracted if colours and patterns emerge, look past the glimmer as if attempting to see through a veil. Consider this stage a power surge; the longer the breath is held, the farther the leap. Discharge occurs upon exhalation, so try not to be startled. Maintain composure and cling to the same cerebral anchor as before, while allowing the body to drift back into its natural breathing-rhythm. Upon stabilisation; avoid analysing what just happened, instead repeating the cycle without further ado. Potency increases with each time, so complete at least three or four rounds.

We hear from Tyler immediately following his maiden voyage.

– I wouldn’t call it failure – over the course of my magical work I have learned better than to say that, but damn that was tough. Being asthmatic, anything to do with shortness of breath is a real challenge and goes against everything I struggle with on a daily basis.

This sounds all too familiar; the answer is dried mullein leaves, which when smoked can relieve respiratory issues caused by conditions such as asthma. Note that I’m saying this fully aware of how preposterous it sounds to smoke something for an ailment of the lungs, but do try.

– Will do. Anyway, the first cycle was ridiculous. I imagined my doppelganger standing behind me; mocking my shaky, exaggerated body as I struggled to inhale deeply – then straining to retain said air followed by my rickety frame spasming in an attempt to ‘exhale naturally’, with no sense of grace whatsoever.

Tyler reports that over the course of his first sojourn, he received neither visions nor other displays of sensory extravagance – no ejection from corporeal form or cataclysmic shifts in perspective. He was not born anew.

– The second round was much more effective, almost graceful and composed. At this point I had a candle poised in front of me, I typically use something similar to promote the flickering aspect of brain activity. Despite feeling more in control of my form this time, I completed only nine breaths before rendered unable to go on, resorting to normal breathing for about thirty seconds before the third cycle.

Deciding that total darkness was necessary to fully submerge and calm himself, Tyler snuffed out the candle.

– I was almost at peace with the breathing rhythm, despite pushing my limits. It

my belladonna

occurred to me that I had no concept of how much half my breath was, so I simply tried expelling air from my torso until comfortable – at which point I would inflate myself again. Disappointingly, I could only go four breaths before a most unsettling blackness consumed me and I thought I was going to pass out.

This would be a heavy indication you're on the right track, so hold fast.

– Oh. I was simply swimming in a sea of pure black; it felt thick and bizarrely unporous, which I don't even think is a word but implies the lack of breathable membrane. I thought about the potential ways I could die, all involving acute oxygen deprivation – some even bordering the realms of the fantastical, such as being swallowed by a leviathan or suffocated by a python.

From my understanding, this death anxiety is a combination of two things. Firstly, the body is freaking out due to the disrupted oxygen flow – and secondly; classic resistance from an ego about to be bypassed, similar to the swarms of distracting thoughts when approaching meditative catharsis. In this instance, stress signals are sent to a vessel that already thinks it's dying and thusly generates predictable reactions. When the fear comes, dig a little deeper and lean right into it.

– A few gasps of air and then, goddammit, I have to do this for the sake of the experiment... Round four; pretty much the same as round three, four breaths before I simply couldn't do it any longer.

Fortunately, despite not quite entering orbit – Tyler claims excitement to try this again.

– I'm not naïve enough to have expected total victory on the first go. Even now I'm still experiencing the sensations of extreme oxygenation in body and head, thinking maybe I strained a few muscles in my chest from overdoing the inhalation process.

The next day I once again speak to our somewhat startled celestial rocketeer, now following his second attempt. Tyler lives in Oregon State, where cannabis is legal – and as a reliable meditation aid he decided to see if it would be beneficial for this exercise.

– Inhaling the magick on my first of thirteen breaths, I tried getting comfortable but in the process started fidgeting to the extent that it must have looked as if I was suffering a seizure. Also, I should have remembered from yesterday how one goes from shivering cold to boiling hot in about three intakes.

A noticeable increase in body temperature is yet another sign of travelling in the right direction. Getting warmer, so to speak.

– Between sitting up and laying on my back, then the same but with arms extended

above my head... all of that ate up ten of thirteen breaths from the first cycle. It was preposterous, but got me over that point of adjusting to the sensation and psyching myself up for the second wave where I expected to find my place and pace.

After briefly bracing himself, Tyler set sail once again.

– It began smoother and more controlled than yesterday's attempt. My attention was primarily drawn to the top half of my head where I noticed utter blackness, which then transformed into the texture adorning the inside of my skull; inky, glistening black in clouds of dark smoke.

Perhaps it bears mentioning at this point that our conversation took place shortly following the actual experience, and as such not long after herbal combustion.

– This round probably surpassed thirteen, I drifted off in exploration and I'm not quite sure for how long. My consciousness was drawn towards a place that might have been beneficial to this experiment but most certainly wasn't mentioned in the instructions, so I resumed focus on my breathing pattern.

Let it be known that they are guidelines, not scripture. Should one arrive at the open gateways of divine truth, some deviation from protocol would be tolerated.

– Breathing from this point on was concentrated in the upper torso and head. My chest felt over-inflated – including my blood vessels and nerves and veins and arteries... everything below the waist felt like a cold block. It's difficult to explain, my sense of hearing was also affected.

A distorted, buzzing sound is common at this stage – it sounds almost as if slowly tuning into a new radio frequency.

– I kept trying to draw in a bit more air than was comfortable – without shaking this time, and it seemed to get me closer to expulsion... alas, the second cycle somehow ended in mystery as I don't even recall taking a break before commencing the next.

This would in fact imply some manner of success. Retaining oxygen for long enough can impart a temporary amnesic blackout as the mind is flung elsewhere, leaving breathing on bodily autopilot.

– That must have been it because I had instigated a third cycle here, and then started getting these intense feelings of discomfort again.

This is unfortunately the trial lurking on the other side of the black hole, one which must be negotiated in order to complete the journey. Not by employing distractions or resistance, but by surrendering to the fear – which is obviously easier said than done.

– Fighting to push through, I detected a surmounting constriction in my chest that wasn't going to cease unless I backed down. I knew I was on that cusp the whole time –

even as the asphyxiating sensation rushed into my forehead, followed by suffocating defeat. I just couldn't persist and that was it, nine breaths on the third cycle and I crashed.

Admittedly, it takes some practice before one adjusts to the oxygen-rush. It's when holding the final, thirteenth breath for as long as possible that things get particularly interesting.

– I realise how close I was, or perceived to be; right at the threshold of bursting out... I'm a slow learner though, I typically don't immediately fall in full step with these sorts of practices without some trial and perseverance – so I'm not discouraged at all.

Was there any significant benefit to the herbal addition?

– I'm not sure at this point. I specifically chose this particular cannabis strain because I've experienced incredible visuals under its watch, without embarking on a full-blown trip. I avoided the sedating varieties, reasoning that a mildly propulsive selection would benefit lift-off. Perhaps next time I'll step it up to one of the heavyweights.

Finally, we wrap up with a few musings that Tyler brought back from the ether.

– My repeated insistence on starting off the experiment with bodily hyperactivity – and my failure in even trying to ease smoothly into the inhalations, instead finding myself aiming for catapult sensation right from the start... what the hell was that about?

Figuring out a suitable position and rhythm is a matter of trial and error, I would be shocked if anyone instantly transcended during their debut.

– It was also interesting to find my skull a solid black inside; no Ajna chakra evident, or light emanating inward. I also reflected on your remark, 'resistance from an ego being bypassed', in regards to breathing – wondering where my ego stops and basic survival skills begin.

Tyler also evaluates if perhaps meditative catharsis minus the panicked feelings of lethal suffocation might be a preferable route towards spiritual understanding.

– Simultaneously, I love the challenge and the process by which I work towards a solution for navigating my own inhibitions. These and other questions are raised and left for me to ponder.



1994 2001 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

DESTRÖYER 666

NOWADAYS ONE CAN'T REALLY SPECIFY WHERE THEY'RE FROM OR WHAT STYLE OF METAL THEY PLAY. WHAT'S INDISPUTABLE IS DESTRÖYER 666'S RETURN, HERALDED BY NEW ALBUM "WILDFIRE". I CATCH UP WITH FOUNDING MEMBER, GUITAR PLAYER AND VOCALIST KK WARSLUT – A ROAMING AUSTRALIAN NOMAD CURRENTLY DWELLING IN LONDON. HE GIVES A CANDID ACCOUNT OF HIS JOURNEY FROM HARSH BEGINNINGS IN A DESOLATE TOWN TO AN LSD-INDUCED DESCENT INTO RAT-INFESTED DARKNESS WHERE BEING HUNTED AS PREY GIFTED HIM TOTAL PREDATORY AWARENESS. HOW HE WENT FROM UTTERLY DRAINED OF CREATIVITY TO ATTAINING DIVINE INSPIRATION WHILE ALONE IN THE NIGHT, CONDUCTING A DIRGE FOR A DECEASED FRIEND.

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– Shrapnel leaving was the deciding moment, says KK. I spent a few months in a stupor but then decided that not writing an album I liked would be disrespectful to both of us.

In 2012, the guitar player of sixteen years left DESTRÖYER 666 in order to move back home to Australia. Instead of resignation, this turned out to be the jackboot up his procrastinated posterior KK needed to start composing again – the result being "Wildfire".

– It was both old and new ideas. Some that didn't get the push they needed in the "Defiance" (2009) writing sessions but mainly new ones. The new boys also added bits and pieces, the album wouldn't be exactly what it is without them.

The newcomers are Swedish drummer Perra (NOMINON, IN AETERNUM), UK guitarist Ro (GRAVE MIASMA) and Chilean bass player Felipe (PROCESSION, NIFELHEIM).

– Okoi of BÖLZER also lent a hand and Laurent from CHAPEL OF DISEASE played some solos, each adding their own paw prints.

Seven years have passed since "Defiance", an album on which

the music was entirely written by Shrapnel and ex-bass player Matt Razor (RAZOR OF OCCAM). After "Cold Steel... for an Iron Age" (2002), KK found that settling in the Netherlands had left his connection to the Muse completely severed.

– It would be wrong of me to blame a whole country for my own laziness and lack of inspiration but I'm going to anyway. As many things as I love about the Dutch people and their culture, living there for seven years sent me into a black hole of inspiration-sapping depression. The country imparted upon me a pragmatic inclination to previously abhorrent abstracts like careers, security and familiar routines.

KK remembers Holland as a mostly mundane, yet strange place.

– You could buy whores, grass and mushrooms and yet the people were strangely conformist. Perhaps liberalism pacifies the urge to rebellion and other governments could learn from it. On the other hand, I think its small size and largely village-based populations bred a need to get along which led to this kind of apathetic conformity.

During a few periods in the time he lived there the country didn't even have a functioning government, but instead of infrastructural collapse everything remained working; trains arrived on time, business went on and people seemed to take it all in their stride.

– They accepted both the euro and subsequent doubling of the cost of a loaf of bread with barely a murmur. They saw their public health service taken away and were then charged three times the amount for private health insurance and not a protest to be seen. Perhaps they saw that voting against being in the EU achieved nothing and lost hope. As Selim once told me: For the Dutch, 'normal' is crazy enough.

In hindsight, he believes what depressed him the most was the country's lack of natural wilderness.

– Driving across it, it seemed every single piece of land was accounted for. All neatly divided up into right-angled subdivisions with the express purpose of providing food and making money. Having no mountains only insured that the acquisition of land seemed total. My eyes would light up on seeing a forest and I'd think: Ah, Europe as I saw it in pictures. Then a few hundred metres later it was gone! More fuckin' cows and fields. No wonder they legalised drugs.

Surely, it can't have been all that dreadful if you remained there for seven years?

– Of course I'm generalising about a whole population here – in no way do I want to belittle their generosity and hospitality, I made



IN THE ABYSS

some lifelong brothers and sisters there too. I could just as well have described their many positive attributes but that would go nowhere in explaining my descent into a bureaucratic spiral of spiritual poverty.

KK points to the nation's contributions, or lack thereof, to the extreme metal scene as an example.

– There's a reason there are no comparable bands to BATHORY, PRIMORDIAL, BURZUM or EMPEROR from Holland. For that reason we can only marvel and wonder at how the fountain that was THE DEVIL'S BLOOD sprung forth from such a place. And from fucking Eindhoven of all places, which I can say unequivocally is a great spiritual void.

DESTRÖYER 666 started out an Australian band and managed to remain one for the longest time, despite intercontinental relocation. Alas, homogeneity has now yielded to the forces of reality and with members from Sweden, Australia, Chile and the UK implemented an ethnic diversity more in line with contemporary European multiculturalism.

– The countries you mention are all western to my mind so there is nothing multi about it. In fact, our session bass player is from Iran and there is still nothing multi about it. His father was brought up under the Shah's regime and grew up listening to AC/DC and METALLICA. He left the country to escape the totalitarian theocracy that has hindered that country since the 'revolution' of Islam over the previously western-backed corrupt government that at least allowed some degree of freedom of choice.

KK himself is from a rather peculiar place; Whyalla – a small town in the south of Australia with a populace of 22000. What makes it remarkable is the town's massive influence over the Aussie metal scene, with her wayward sons venturing out to become driving forces in the likes of CORPSE MOLESTATION, BESTIAL WARLUST, DESTRÖYER 666, RAZOR OF OCCAM, GOSPEL OF THE HORNS and VOMITOR.

– It was a small, isolated industrial town run by the one steelworks company, bikers and a strong drug culture. For my generation, folks were predominantly termed 'rockers'; long-haired hard rock fans who wore BLACK SABBATH, MOTÖRHEAD and Harley Davidson t-shirts. There was also a small contingent of skinheads and punks which gave us an 'other' to loathe, fear and fight.

The elder rockers were into George Thorogood, Rory Gallagher, PINK FLOYD, THE DOORS, BLACK SABBATH, JUDAS PRIEST and MOTÖRHEAD. When the young adepts embraced thrash metal, it was not appreciated in the slightest and devotion to this new musical phenomenon would render chastisement.

– Studded armbands were especially despised and a bullet belt would've been



considered laughable. Folks there actually hunted and owned guns so for a kid to wear empty machine-gun casings would've seemed ludicrous and good cause for a beating.

Due to availability of cheap government housing and work at the rapidly diminishing steel industry, Whyalla was used by the state capital as a dumping ground for various undesirable elements of society.

– Welfare cases, single mothers, ex-cons and the like. The ship-building industry that instigated the house-building boom folded when I was still a child, leaving a void filled by bikers, V8 culture and dope growing. I'd say the small yet motivated metal scene came about due to the musical background of our elders and for much the same reasons it did in places like Newcastle and Birmingham. It was such an austere and otherwise depressing place it made harsh music wailing about better and usually violent things seem not just appropriate but essential in dealing with our surrounding.

Despite its barren bleakness, KK still believes Whyalla to have been a decent enough place to grow up in. Fights never reached knife-point and disputes were settled with fists and steel-capped boots conveniently supplied by the local steelworks industry.

– Though it could be tiring due to everyone else being a potential rival to your sovereignty and reputation, including your own mates. It was like being brought up by a pack of wild dogs – every hound for himself. You were challenged constantly, a ritual that could begin hundreds of metres away. Simply seeing a stranger walking towards you was cause for extra strut and the inevitable stare-down as you passed. Looking away meant surrender and you could rest assured

your reputation would have suffered by the time you reached your destination. Even if this was not the case, it was enough that both parties believed it to be so. This could get very tiring when music had become your primary interest.

He adds that if the town could be summed up in a single verse, it would be RIGHTEOUS PIGS' "Stone Cold Bitch".

"I'm in the middle of nowhere

Nothing to do but grow my hair

Drinking vodka and Jim Beam too

I got myself a bitch but she won't be fucken true"

– Though to be fair, only one of us was good-looking enough to actually have a permanent girlfriend. The rest of us squabbled over the scrubbers before they got pregnant and embarked upon a career of bad mothering at age seventeen.

The reasons none of the town's musical prospects remained there for very long are gradually becoming ever clearer.

– I'm generalising for comedic effect, for every ten slappers carving a path to a seat on the Jerry Springer show there was one that didn't. My first girlfriend got pregnant at age fourteen, raised her child and then returned to school. Last I saw her she was a partner in an international wine company and had just bought a 60000 dollar Jeep Cherokee for her daughter's twenty-first birthday. As I was bragging about having played a show in Chile, she feigned interest and remarked that she ran an office in the same country and spent about four months a year living there, whilst not in Paris, London, Milan or Sydney. Or in her holiday house on the beach south of Adelaide. Then she brought up how I used to fuck her for about three seconds when I was fourteen, it was around then I remembered a super

KK

important band meeting, made my excuses and left.

Moving from an isolated settlement of 20 000 to Melbourne, a metropolitan city of three million, was a bit of a culture shock at the tender age of eighteen. KK's upbringing under the law of the club and fang made life in the big city quite perplexing at first.

– Simply too many others to contend with. Fortunately, metal and my natural disposition had been pushing me towards a more individualistic outlook before I left. Taking LSD and reading Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Jung and Charles Manson provided the final push from the 'desolate city' mind-set. Having said that, I don't believe we're ever truly free of our cultural roots. Unlike a real culture that has constants, ours is an ever-changing thing swayed by transient nonsense. When I last returned five years ago it reminded me of nothing but the things I'd disliked about the place. Gone were the denim-clad, steel-capped, long-haired biker rocker types who were the half-decent role models of our youth.

Something else that differed from his hometown was the metal scene.

– I loved the abundance of metal. Whyalla had one metal gig from an out-of-town band in the entire time I lived there and the nearest venue was five hundred kilometres away. The biggest difference was, at home it was the cool and heavy kids that got into metal whereas in the big smoke it seemed to be mostly spotty dweebs. Another thing I noticed was the kids who were the most into it – the ones writing to Dead (MORBID, MAYHEM), had a pink-covered "Deathcrush" (MAYHEM) and ordered the "Thy Kingdom Come" (MORBID ANGEL) demo; a few years later they were the first out of the scene. The more fanatical, the more fleeting it seemed.

At the time, Melbourne had a huge glam scene and boasted the world's biggest glam rock nightclub.

– The fuckin' thing got two thousand people in there every weekend! You'd walk in for a piss and there'd be fags fluffing up their already fluffy hair in front of the mirror. You'd wait in line for a piss – stroll over, undo ya' zip, take a leak, do ya' zip up and then have to make your way past the same fags still pruning themselves. Sadly, by the time our hair was long enough to get laid in that place, grunge had hit. It looked like a sad, empty graveyard with a few old decrepit glam rock zombies staggering about looking for the flesh of the drunk and the stupid. Luckily, the effects of BEHERIT, BLASPHEMY and NUCLEAR DEATH were starting to make not getting laid seem momentarily unimportant.

In 1990, KK was one of the founding members of what are now underground legends CORPSE MOLESTATION, who went on to become BESTIAL WARLUST in 1993. At this

point, divisions had appeared in the Melbourne metal scene, with BESTIAL WARLUST on one side and seemingly everyone else on the other.

– We had a fella called Damo on vocals, he had a falling-over problem when drunk. He started falling over into lots of fights, which dragged me and Death Dealer (VOMITOR) into it. At one point, we were all falling into fights. Things turned really sour when Skullfucker (guitars, BESTIAL WARLUST) was drinking and fell into a fight with an old lady collecting donations for some desperate cause. I left the band not long after that.



ESTER SEGARRA

This is what ultimately led to the formation of DESTROYER 666.

– Before I left I had started jamming with Chris Volcano (ABOMINATOR, IGNIVOMOUS), who ended up playing drums on the "Six Songs with the Devil" (1994) demo. Initially it was just to play some thrash metal and being the usual egotistical little cunt musician that I was, I'd taken offence that BESTIAL WARLUST rejected my song "The Eternal Glory of War". In retrospect, they made the right choice but at the time I was unduly hurt by this grave injustice. Anyway, it was all these things combined that led me to leave the band. I rarely make a big decision based on just one reason alone – for me it's not about whether the coffee cup is half full or not, it's how quick and easily I can get a refill.

Lyrics on the previous record were a bit more opinionated in comparison to "Wildfire" – have you had a relapse to the disdainful nihilism of the "Cold Steel..." era?

– No, I hope the opposite. I fear my previous rants might have been misconstrued to

justify apathy and resignation, which wasn't my intention at all. I despised the world that man had created but never had any perverse loathing for the planet itself. It would be disingenuous of me to use the symbol of the wolf as often as I did and not have a genuine love for nature.

This usage of the wolf as an archetype, the concept of lycanthropy and outlook of the predator has been with DESTROYER 666 since the demo.

– Like many a wayward youth I was fascinated by serial killers, in particular their lack of compunction and seeming lack of

remorse. Further research taught me they were just sick puppies screaming for help and whose deviant sexuality compelled them to kill, despite the subsequent crippling guilt. Nothing to learn there, I thought. Now, the so-called 'Manson girls' were a different kettle of fish.

August 1969; under guidance from a man named Tex Watson, three female members of the so-called 'Manson family' murdered pregnant actress Sharon Tate and several other people, primarily by stabbing them multiple times. According to KK, Manson's involvement ended at providing the spiritual foundation to be able to commit such acts. He claims the entire case and the circumstances leading up to it have been heavily distorted into the present-day 'Helter Skelter' fantasy and urges whoever is interested to check out Nikolas Schreck's 2011 book *The Manson File: Myth and Reality of an Outlaw Shaman*.

– To kill out of love – a foreign concept to most of us. I was intrigued at how twenty year old women could first stab and mutilate, then make a sandwich and hitch-hike

KK's Abraxas & the Rats

home. Every girl I knew, despite eating meat couldn't kill a fucking chicken. For half a year or so, alone in the park, I would attempt to find that place within me and despite my most earnest efforts – without any luck. That's what happens with little guidance and much fumbling about in the dark – women, take note here.

Eventually and following the Manson family's lead, KK turned to the ergot fungus for guidance – synthesised in the form of LSD. Deeming the trail to journey's end a long one; he thought it prudent to ingest two doses at once.

– Describing a psychedelic experience to those who haven't had one is like describing being in love to someone who's never been in love. My first port of call was a sense of timelessness, as if my year in Melbourne had started that very morning. I knew from Manson's 'coming to now' that I was onto something and was overcome with a great sense of excitement, coupled with the fear that comes when the ego finds itself being usurped.

Later that night, a friend came over and wanted in on the trip. Ever vigilant, KK kept his stash in a baby bottle hidden in the crawlspace under his house. Climbing down through the hole in the floorboards, he commenced the fifteen metre crawl through cobwebs and inky blackness.

– All the while surrounded by an infinite army of rats, seemingly intent on following my every fucking move. Nobody likes wild rats, especially when ya' can't see the disgusting, bitey little cunts. Thanks to the LSD I could actually visualise them; big, ravenous and seemingly keen on chewing my face off. Now understand that due to the drug this seemed to last a lifetime, like a suburban teenage Beowulf's adventure of sorts.

Being preyed upon alone in the dark forced him into fight or flight mode, the instinctual test of one's mettle – settling for the former alternative. He swore that the next rodent within striking distance was going to get its head 'chewed right the fuck off'.

– I froze. Absolute stillness. My breathing became slow, controlled and imperceptible. My ears filled in the spaces the pitch black had deprived me of as sound became magnified beyond anything I had ever experienced before. My sense of smell became infinitely more acute. From the moment I froze, so did every living thing down there. Every rat in the darkness knew I was no longer a fumbling, bumbling human twat – but rather an acutely aware kid, high enough on acid to bite heads off rodents.

And that was the moment he experienced what he calls lycanthropy.

– No full moon, no howling, no fantasies of hunting humans around cemeteries. In retrospect, I look upon it as a form of meditation. Not meditation as most of us know

it; the eastern practice where you sit for hours contemplating your navel whilst trying not to think about your navel. It's my belief that won't work for many folks – especially westerners with our fast-paced, distraction-led existence. We need something more vital. More ecstatic, tangible and real. It taught me many things, one being that the path to this kind of enlightenment is not through wishful thinking of being the predator. One needs to first feel the absolute and complete awareness of being prey. Presumably, the state man and his half-monkey predecessors were in for millions of years.

This is a state of being mentioned often in Charles Manson's writings, the philosophy being that total fear equates total awareness.

– For me, it was essential that fear be instigated by something real and tangible. Which brings me to another revelation I had that night; that for myself, the spirit world – and I hate to use that hackneyed term so fraught with preconceived new-agey notions, and this world are neither distinct nor separate. There's a reason many a great psychedelic experience is best had in the woods; 'where beast and man intersect – there one finds enlightenment'. If your primeval sense of survival isn't part of it, you're guilty of putting another concept above and beyond your natural state. Being animals with exaggerated cognitive abilities, only the human animal is capable of doing this and we do so to our own detriment.

He adds that religious ascetics regularly indulge in this kind of behaviour. Now, the question is whether he ever discovered how those girls did what they did, supposedly out of love, back in 1969.

– Yes, I did. It would however be pointless to explain how. Not because I'm too wise and above the simple man, nor because it's too complicated for you mongoloids but because it's just far too simple. I'd never have understood it without going through it myself. There's an important current running through all this, enlightenment wasn't found in some Buddhist temple or by reciting incantations to obscure deities. It was

simple, dirty, and subterranean. It didn't happen above the clamour of the masses, nor in some therapist's armchair but rather beneath all that in the filthy rat-infested crawlspaces most folks wouldn't venture into. Who can blame them – it stinks and is full of rodents, spiders, cockroaches and snakes. Besides, there isn't enough space down there for everyone anyway.

After this experience, he would try to attain this lycanthropic state in various ways outside the rodent nest.

– Each time it got easier, until it became a natural state. Did I lose my way at times since then? Yes, of course.

After having experienced this timeless predatory realisation, I'm curious to hear KK's take on modern technology and its effect on society.

– Inevitable and over-rated. There are many good documentaries about the original optimism those in Silicon Valley had for the internet. It says a lot that their top CEO's choose to keep technology at a distance when rearing their own children. If they kept this a secret, in years to come folks would claim it was a conspiracy to keep us stupid, distracted and in chains – but it's not a secret. Industry, technology and commerce are all lauded by many but it's hard to pinpoint much of it that didn't come with so many negative side-effects it cancelled out any positives.

To illustrate his point, he refers to something as mundane as food.

– Processed food revolutionised the way we ate. Now, we know just about all of it is no good for you. Everything from fuckin' sliced ham to orange juice; salty, sugary, overly processed, additive-filled shit. But we're stuck with it now and it must be good because that's what we've been told.

The only lyric that deals with current day gripes is "Hounds at ya back", which assails the anti-biker laws implemented in the Australian state of Queensland.

– Well, that and "Die you fuckin' Pig" which concerns the kiddie-fiddling followers of Abraham. The theme of "Hounds at ya back" is the VLAD (Vicious Lawless Association Disestablishment Act 2013) laws, which are just one further step to the total surveillance state sweeping the western world.

One reason this hits home is KK's belief that metal culture has drawn much inspiration directly from the outlaw biker movement.

– In almost every respect. From unwashed denim vests and leather jackets, a love of patches and studs all the way to lyrics about the freedom of the road and gang life.

This is a bit contradictory to the standard narrative, attributing the studs and leather to Rob Halford of JUDAS PRIEST who in turn got it from the mid-seventies gay scene.



– A forgivable mistake but not a well-researched one. The fags actually took it from the biker scene themselves, in the mid-sixties. There was a contingent of them riding big motorcycles and although not fitting in with mainstream society's sexual mores, also didn't fit into the camp-riden gay scene. These folks were no pussies; they just preferred man-arse to women. Gays that weren't fags, if I can blend colloquialisms like that. They rode motorcycles and beat up folks who gave them the wrong kind of hard time. They adopted the look the outlaw motorcycle clubs had been using for quite some time, in fact all the way back to the release of 1953 movie "The Wild One".

KK points out that the VLAD laws could potentially be used to target other groups, not only bikers.

- As the one prominent club has said since seventies: If they come for us – you're next!

The final song “Tamam Shud” is a requiem for Selim Lemouchi of THE DEVIL’S BLOOD, who passed away in March 2014.

— Firstly, I'd hate for anyone to think that I'm insinuating that I was Selim's closest friend or part of some inner circle of confidants. I knew him since 2007 and we were in quite frequent touch during his final five weeks. Yes, it did have a profound impact on me. I think it's fair to say that Selim's presence had an impact on most folks so it only makes sense his sudden departure would have one too.

He describes the conception of the revised lyrics as the only truly inspired moment of his life. In this instance, inspiration as the ancient Greeks meant it; 'entheos' from the ancient Greek meaning 'possessed by a god, inspired'.

– I had already finished them before the studio, then one night our engineer and close friend Criss Mersus (who was also the DESTROYER 666 drummer from 2001 to 2012) gave me the keys to the studio and left me for the night to record vocals. The first part of the lyrics were simply some questions about mortality I'd asked myself once too many times to forget. The second half – though ostensibly about Selim, seemed to again reflect too much of my own thoughts and feelings. Once I'd decided this wasn't right at all and I'd need to start from scratch I let myself slide into the night, so to speak. A cool clear evening with the full moon illuminating the darkness.

He describes a sensation in which the words seemed to simultaneously come from within and without.

– I was both in tears and joyous at the same time. Fear came and faded. There are many words for this flood of emotions, none of which will mean anything to those who haven't experienced it. Suffice it to say; I truly understood what it means to feel as if you're channelling pure energy. I felt first-hand the great transformative effect writing music can have for the artist. What it means to have witnessed and known a truly unique and amazing individual passing through this world. Even the kind of rock vibe going on in the latter part of the song came from that experience; all made in the studio that night. The subject matter dictated and demanded it end this way.

Tamam shud is a Persian term, meaning ‘the ending’. It’s from a collection of poems called *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Khayyam, who lived between 1048 and 1131, was a Persian mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and poet.

– I came across his book out of curiosity, the words *tamam shud* were one of few cryptic clues in the intriguing South Australia murder mystery named after it.

Thus; a song called 'the ending', about the ending – written by the ending.

– It felt like a gift imparted from the man and it's true to say, in my experience, that he was a man who gave a lot. Someone you could truly learn from. It's testimony to his shining brilliance that I was still learning from him even after he had exited. I feel honoured and privileged to have known him the little I did and I know many share this sentiment. If my recollection of the song-writing process seems overly romanticised, then I don't apologize for that. That's



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just how it was. Only with copious use of LSD had I experienced something like it before.

What are your strongest memories of him?

– Sometime at early o'clock, still up and cognisant, watching him on his acoustic guitar singing a new song called “The Yonder Beck-
ons”. The song ended up brilliant and still moves me today but will
never have the impact it had that night.

The remaining songs appear to dwell on the venerated crafts of carousing and copulation – preferably in combination.

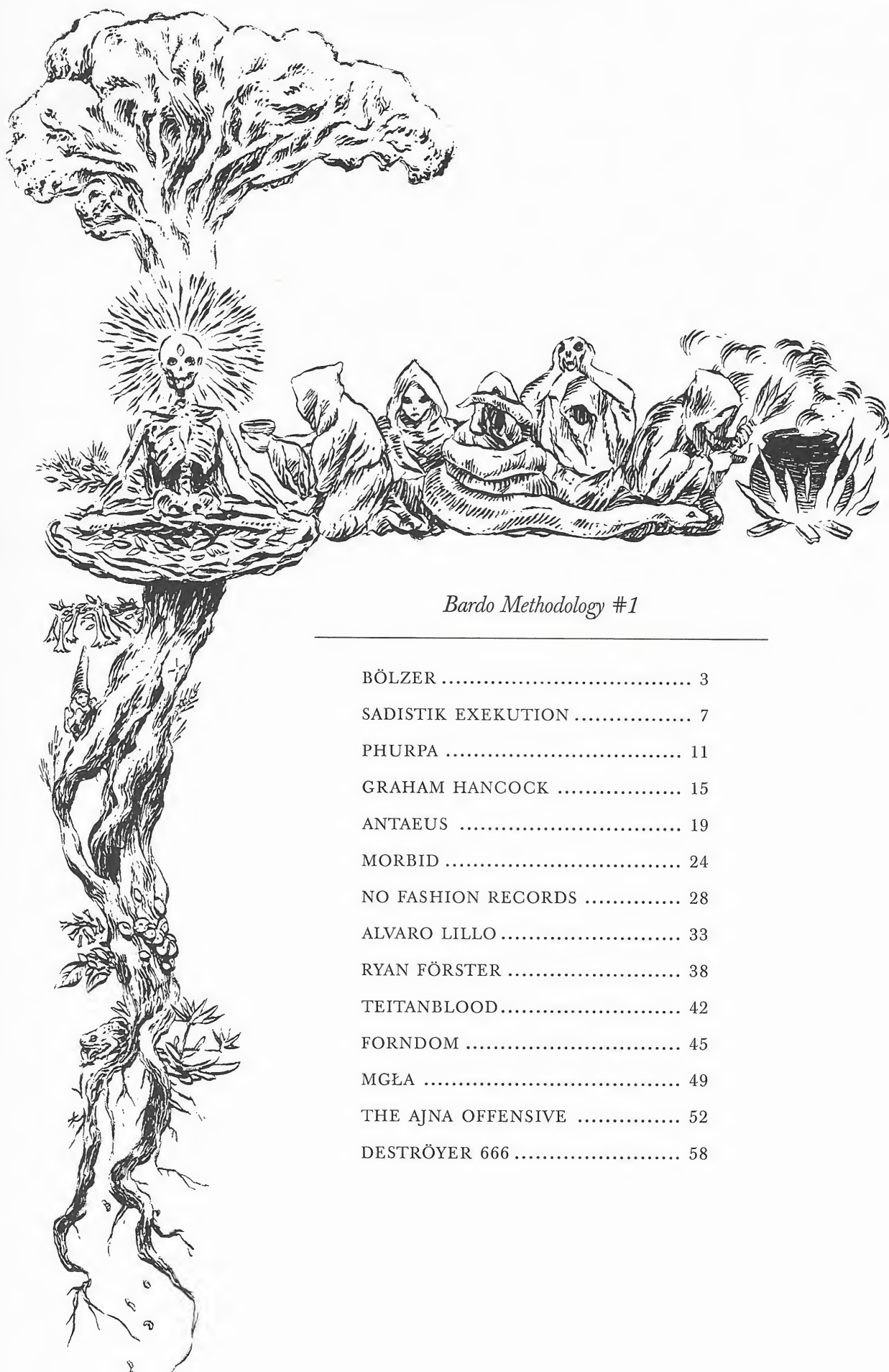
- The lyrics reflect my life of the past few years and also explain why it took so long.

The saga of DESTROYER 666 has been playing out uninterrupted for twenty-two years now, which is rather impressive for an underground metal band where hard work reaps few monetary rewards.

– I'm not sure I feel pride that way. In my younger days, strangely enough for a metalhead, I thought it important to 'say something'. It never occurred to me that I wasn't supposed to do that in an underground metal band. I understood pop bands were shackled to labels with large financial concerns but that was not my path so of no bother. Of course, I would be proven wrong. I always understood a 'record' to also be a record in the other sense, a record of events or of one's life and thoughts. As you can see, I had some romantic notions about music – ideals I probably picked up from the artists of the sixties and seventies. And for better or worse I'm happy I did that. I'm glad I surrounded myself with some top-notch musicians who went on to become lifelong mates.

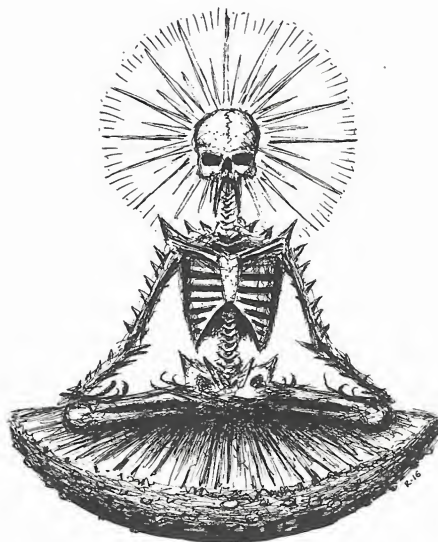
Do you think the band has already hit its peak or is there a greater plateau on the horizon?

- The trip comes in waves, everyone should know that.



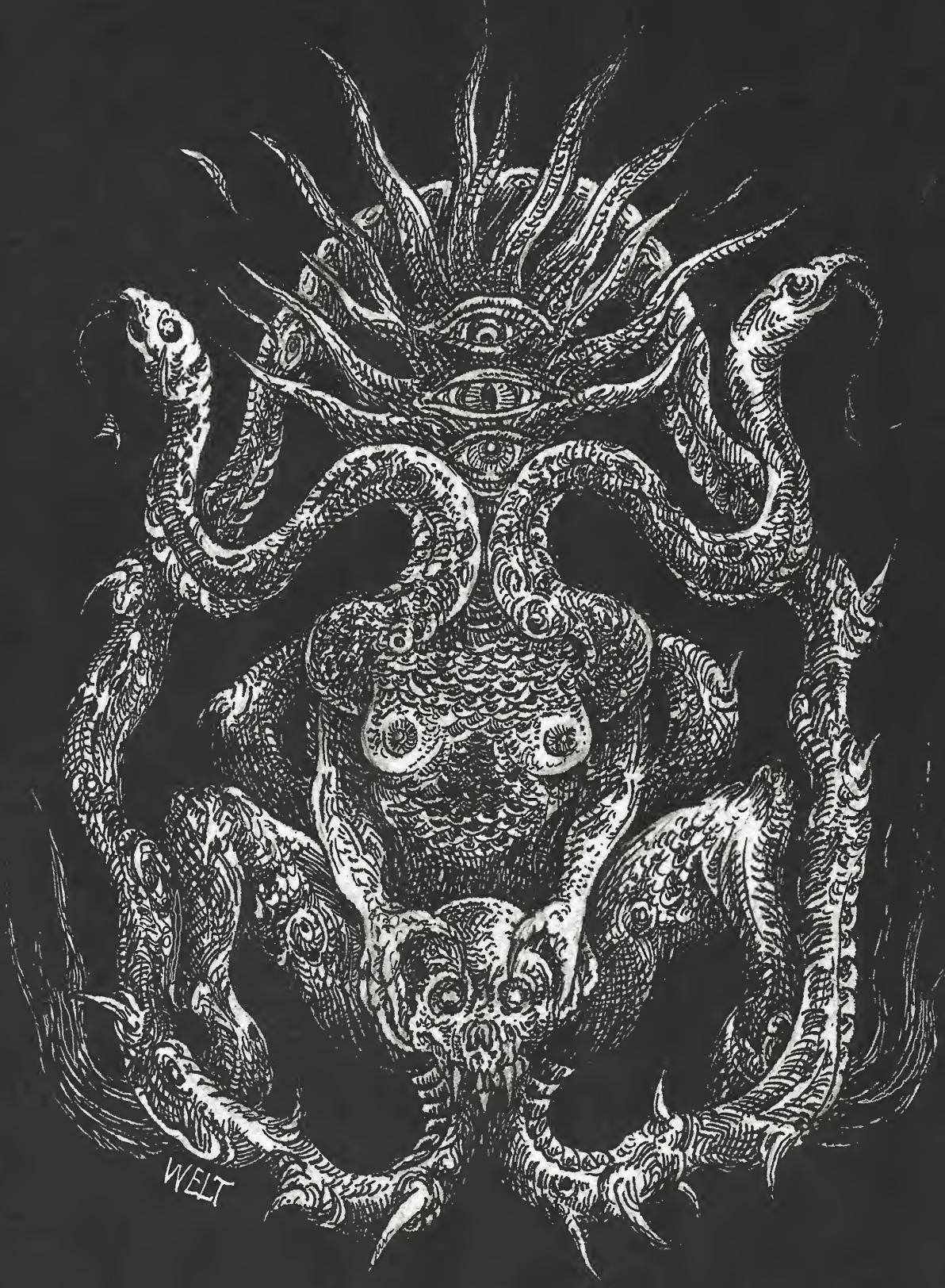
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